THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE MAHĀYĀNA-HĪNAYĀNA DISTINCTION IN THE *MAHĀYĀNASŪTRĀLAṂKĀRA*: A TERMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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For my grandfather,
Michele Ruffolo

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1
General introduction

According to contemporary scholarship, the Mahāyāna is generally said to have its beginnings sometime between the start of the first century BCE and the end of the first century CE, some four to five centuries after the time of the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, or Śākyamuni.[1] The Mahāyāna has been broadly characterized vis-à-vis non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism in the following terms: soteriologically as oriented towards the goal of buddhahood rather than the individualistic goal of nirvāṇa,[2] and as concerned with the bodhisattva-ideal and the path of the bodhisattva;[3] philosophically as an elaboration of the doctrine of emptiness;[4] cultically as emphasizing devotion to multiple buddhas and bodhisattvas;[5] literarily as the development of a vast number of sūtras and other texts containing various new concepts, doctrines, myths, etc.;[6] and socially as a movement more concerned with the role of laypersons.[7]

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1. If Bechert's dates for the Buddha are used (448-368 BCE), the Mahāyāna would have its beginnings some three to four centuries after the time of the historical Buddha; see Bechert 1982.

2. See Conze 1967: 234; Dayal 1970: 16-18; and Williams 1989: 25.

3. See Conze 1967: 234-237; Dayal 1970, especially: 43-46; Dutt 1930: 238-289; Hirakawa 1990: 302-308; and Williams 1989: 185-214.

4. See Conze 1967: 198; Dutt 1930: 47-49; Luis Gómez, "Buddhism in India," in Kitagawa and Cummings 1987: 77 and 79-80; and Nakamura 1980: 168-170.

5. See Nakamura 1980: 177-182; Snellgrove 1987: 58-61; and Williams 1989: 215-256.

6. See Conze 1967: 198-200; Luis Gómez, "Buddhism in India," in Kitagawa and Cummings 1987: 74-76; Hirakawa 1990: 275-295; and Nakamura 1980: 149-167, 171-176, and 183-234.

7. See Hirakawa 1963: 105-106; Lamotte 1988a: 81-84; and Nakamura 1980: 150-151. Schopen (1979 and 1985) has convincingly argued, however, that the early Mahāyāna should not be thought of as primarily a lay movement.

Whether or not these characteristics capture any purported "essence" of the Mahāyāna, the important point to note is that contemporary scholarship generally identifies and defines the Mahāyāna in relation to non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. Within the Mahāyāna itself, these non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism have been labeled "Hīnayāna"—"inferior vehicle" or "lesser vehicle"—in contradistinction to the "great vehicle" of the "Mahāyāna." Furthermore, one important aspect of the process of Mahāyāna self-definition has been the attempt to establish the Mahāyāna as superior (soteriologically, ethically, philosophically, etc.) to other, non-Mahāyāna, forms of Buddhism. And since the Mahāyāna came to play an important part in the general development of Buddhism, the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna has also assumed a central role in the study of Buddhism by contemporary western scholars. Whether, or in what way, the terms "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" should be used in western scholarship at all is an issue that I will remark on in the general conclusion of this study. Here I only wish to point out that the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna has been influential in the scholarly interpretation of Buddhism.

The fundamental aim of this dissertation is to develop a terminological analysis of the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna found in one fourth-century Indian Buddhist text, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, or the "Ornament to the Mahāyāna Sūtras" (abbreviated MSA), and its commentary, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya* (MSABh).[8] That is to say, my aim is to provide an interpretation of the way in which the

8. The MSA and MSABh will be introduced in depth in the next chapter.

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (MSA) and the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya* (MSABh) defined the Mahāyāna through a particular construction of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction. In carrying out this aim I also hope to achieve two further objectives. The first is to learn more about the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction itself. In presenting a detailed analysis of one specific example of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, I hope to further knowledge of the way in which this distinction has been constructed in Mahāyāna discourse for the purposes of Mahāyāna self-definition. In analyzing one specific case of the how the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction was constructed, I hope to make clearer the generally constructed nature of the distinction itself, both within Mahāyāna Buddhism and in contemporary western scholarship. I hope to contribute to an understanding of just what the terms Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna mean, by showing what the terms meant for one specific and influential Indian Buddhist text. This process of interpreting terms is important, I think, because in order to think critically about the categories employed by contemporary scholarship in an area of study such as Buddhism, one preliminary step is coming to terms with just what those categories have meant in the past. Once the specific categories found in Buddhist texts are understood in a more contextually specific way, contemporary western scholars will be less tempted to simply reproduce those same categories without critically examining them—i.e., without the self-reflection that is a hallmark of historical-critical interpretations of religions. So ultimately I hope that this dissertation will contribute to a more reflective use of the terms Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. That is to say, I hope this study will contribute to the realization that the terms Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are not "out there" somewhere in a

fixed, scholarly "reality"; they should not be facilely taken up and uncritically applied to the vast array of phenomena that have been labeled Buddhist. Rather, these terms—and their specific meanings—have always to be constructed in a particular context, in relation to other particular terms and concepts, and in accordance with some particular interest, intention, or purpose.

The second further objective is to learn more about the particular soteriology of an early and influential Yogācāra text. There are two terms here that call for definition: "soteriology" and "Yogācāra." I will say a few words about each. The term soteriology is formed from the Greek *sōtēr*—"savior, deliverer, preserver"—and *logos*—"thought" or "discourse." A soteriology is usually understood as some theory pertaining to salvation. For the purposes of this study, however, I would like to define a soteriology in the following terms:

> A soteriology is a system of thought which entails two elements: (1) a diagnosis of the human condition—or of sentient existence in general—which characterizes that condition in terms of some fundamental malady; and (2) a prescription for the termination of that malady.

Thus I view a soteriology as a system of thought that contains two elements, a diagnosis and a prescription. Regarding the diagnosis, I identify a soteriology as a system of thought that offers a diagnosis of the human condition in general, rather than a diagnosis of a particular individual or group of individuals in a particular historical context; put in other terms, the diagnosis is one that applies to humans by virtue of being human. Furthermore, I specify that the diagnosis offered by a soteriology must characterize the human condition in terms of some fundamental malady, or some fundamentally

disordered or disturbed condition. Just what that disordered or disturbed condition is, will depend on the particular system of thought and its theory of value, or axiology; the fundamental malady may, for example, be suffering, death, sin, meaninglessness, or neurosis. And the prescription for the termination of the malady must be one which terminates it completely and for all time.

That Buddhism may be generally understood as a soteriology clearly follows from the scheme of the four noble truths; the first two noble truths (suffering and its arising) may be viewed as the diagnosis identified in (1) above; while the last two noble truths (cessation and the path) may be viewed as the prescription identified in (2) above. Regarding the specific theme of this study—the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in the MSA/Bh—the distinction itself may be viewed as a soteriological doctrine since the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are understood as soteriological vehicles—vehicles that convey one to the termination of suffering, which in a Buddhist context is the fundamental malady of sentient existence. And since the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction is a soteriological doctrine, in analyzing this distinction it will be necessary to present the general features of the conception of soteriology at work in the MSA/Bh.[9]

Turning to the second term which calls for definition, the term Yogācāra is often used in contemporary western scholarship to refer to a certain form of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. The Yogācāra is usually associated with texts such as the

9. A brief note on how I will use the term soteriology: I will use the term to pick out a certain sort of discourse: specifically, discourse that pertains to the (1) diagnostic and/or (2) prescriptive aspects of the definition offered above. And so, for example, a Buddhist soteriological goal is a goal that pertains to the termination of the condition of suffering, and a Buddhist soteriological vehicle is a system of beliefs and/or practices that is intended to lead to the termination of suffering.

Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra, *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatā-vibhāga*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, *Viṃśatikā*, and *Triṃśikā*. The Yogācāra probably has its beginnings at the end of the third century CE or the beginning of the fourth.[10] Thus the early Yogācāra postdates the beginning of the Madhyamaka—the other commonly identified form of Mahāyāna philosophy—by one to two centuries.[11]

The Yogācāra—variously known as the Cittamātra (mind-only), Vijñaptimātra (representation-only), or Vijñānavāda (consciousness-doctrine)—is often characterized in western scholarship by the following doctrines: a form of ontological idealism which denies the existence of any objects external to mind; the three-nature (*trisvabhāva*) doctrine which interprets reality according to its dependent, imagined, and perfected aspects; and the positing of the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) which serves as a repository for karmic seeds and operates as the substratum or basis of all other forms of consciousness. In this study, it will be seen that each of these doctrines does play some role in the MSA/Bh's soteriological scheme.

It should be noted that a term such as Yogācāra should be used with caution. Readers may come to think that "Madhyamaka" and "Yogācāra" identify clear and distinct philosophical schools that may be easily identified and distinguished from one

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10. See Lamotte 1935: 25. Specific texts, their possible dates, and their relation to the MSA/Bh are discussed in the next chapter.

11. Nakamura (1980: 235 and 256) places Nāgārjuna at c. 150-250 CE, and Maitreya (as the purported founder of the Yogācāra) at c. 270-350 CE.

another. The case is not as simple as that. Here I will suggest five criteria that may be used for identifying a philosophical school, and identify problems associated with each:

(1) A school may be identified with some specific thesis or set of theses. Problems: key doctrines may be formulated in different ways and using different terms, and it is not always immediately apparent which formulations of a doctrine should be counted as belonging to a particular school, which should be considered as belonging to a separate school (or to a sub-school), and which might even be described as "heterodox."

(2) A school may be identified through the employment of a specific terminology. Problems: terms may be employed in quite different ways, with different meanings, and in association with different complexes of terms.

(3) A school may be identified through its interest in particular philosophical concerns, such as addressing certain topics in a certain way or applying a certain method to various issues. Problems: a school may express interest in various concerns, many of which might overlap with those expressed by other schools, thus making it quite difficult to distinguish one school from another on the basis of this criterion alone.

(4) A school may be identified through association with a certain individual or group of individuals. Problems: in the case of Indian Buddhist thought, it is sometimes quite difficult to establish who the foundational thinkers of a school were. For example, in the case of the Yogācāra school, the foundational thinkers of the school are variously identified as Asaṅga, the brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (who may or may not be the same Vasubandhu who composed the *Abhidharmakośa*), Maitreya, or Maitreyanātha (as a historical personage). Furthermore, the criterion of foundational thinkers is not sufficient for identifying a school since some thinkers may have composed works from the point of view of various schools.

(5) A school may be identified through the criteria offered by some specific internal Buddhist tradition. Problems: contemporary scholarship should not automatically and uncritically reproduce the same categories present in the traditions being studied, since such categories may be based on presuppositions which are not in accordance with those of a historical-critical perspective.

Thus the identification of a philosophical school is no simple matter. Furthermore, since the identification of specific schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy is itself partially

dependent on the extant texts which purportedly represent them, and since a variety of theses, terminologies, concerns, etc. may in many instances be found within one particular text, the identification of schools is all the more problematic. Nevertheless, the terms Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, for example, do appear both in Indian Buddhist sources and in contemporary western scholarship, and thus these terms call for interpretation at some level. I prefer to interpret the terms Yogācāra and Madhyamaka as heuristic devices for picking out certain types of relatively loosely defined and overlapping discourses, rather than as terms identifying two fixed and determinate philosophical schools. When used as heuristic devices, the terms Yogācāra and Madhyamaka may serve as indicators for relating a particular text to the wider discourse(s) in which it should be contextualized.

Again, the second further objective of this dissertation is to present the soteriology of an early and influential Yogācāra text.[12] This objective may be useful for two distinct reasons. The first is that part of the task of coming to a general interpretation of Buddhism is arriving at an interpretation of Buddhist thought. And in order to arrive at defensible interpretations of Buddhist thought, it is necessary to be clear about our sources. One aim of this dissertation, then, is to be clear about just what the MSA/Bh—a source important for the study of Indian Buddhist thought—is saying soteriologically, as this may be understood through the lens of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction at work in the text. Hopefully, then, this dissertation will represent a contribution to a more

12. Although hereafter I will continue to employ the term Yogācāra, it should be understood that I am using the term as an indicator for a certain type of loosely defined discourse. The task of more clearly defining

sophisticated interpretation of the history of Indian Buddhist thought, and more specifically of Yogācāra discourse.

There is also a second reason why the study of the soteriology of an early and influential Yogācāra text may be useful. While the MSA/Bh itself is certainly less than systematic, it does present some rather sophisticated reflections on and responses to questions of the meaning of the human condition, considered in its widest context. While one may (and perhaps should) disagree to a greater or lesser extent with the particular responses offered by the MSA/Bh, coming to understand such responses formulated in non-western traditions of thought may both broaden the scope in terms of which such questions are considered, and develop one's ability to think about such issues more carefully and more profoundly.

The method employed in carrying out this study is one of terminological analysis through a historically-critically informed reading of the text. By terminological analysis I mean the process of focusing interpretive efforts on specific terms that are taken to be central to the conceptual complexes developed by the text. And I understand a historical-critical reading of a text to be one which does not assume that the terms and concepts under consideration have one definitive form and meaning, but rather that their various forms and meanings arise and change in relation to various specific historical contexts. The terms focused on in this study were identified through their relation to the general theme (i.e., the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction); that is to say, the terms for which I will

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this discourse can only come about after further detailed studies of various sources have been brought together.

provide detailed analyses are those terms that are most important to—or used most often in relation with—the construction of the scheme of soteriological vehicles in the MSA/Bh. The main body of the dissertation, then, is comprised of focused analyses of those specific terms, in order to identify the contexts in which they are used, their meanings, and their relations to other terms. After discussing the specified terms in this way, I also endeavor to provide further analysis of them; that is to say, I will also identify some conceptual implications of the particular terms at work in the text. My aim in identifying conceptual implications is to elucidate the meaning of the terms in a wider context. I think that the question of the meaning of a term is best addressed both by examining the meanings through which the term functions in the text and by considering the more general implications of the term—that is to say, what the term *means* in relation to other terms and concepts at work in the text.

Although the MSA has not been widely studied by western scholars, some quite useful work on the text has been done. The most important has certainly been Lévi's Sanskrit edition of the MSA and MSABh, based on a single Sanskrit manuscript.[13] Second in importance has been Nagao's two-volume index to the text (1958, 1961). I have also greatly benefited from Griffiths' studies of omniscience (1990a) and the *tathāgatagarbha* (1990b) in the MSA, and from Ruegg's discussion of various aspects of the text in his extensive study of the *tathāgatagarbha*-theory (1969). The works of Griffiths and Ruegg have informed this dissertation both through their specific

13. This edition was published in 1907. A French translation of the text was then published by Lévi in 1911. See Chapter 2 and the Bibliography for further details.

conclusions and through their general approach to Buddhist texts. There are also three other studies that I have found particularly useful: Davidson's study of *āśraya-parivṛtti/-parāvṛtti* (transformation of the basis) (1985), Keenan's work on the *Buddhabhūmy-upadeśa* (1980), and Nguyen's translation and study of Sthiramati's subcommentary to the ninth chapter of the MSA (1990). Finally, some studies on related themes are Buswell and Gimello on Buddhist paths (1992), Cohen on the categories Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna (1995), Fujita on the *ekayāna* (1975), and Harrison on Mahāyāna self-identity (1987).

The general plan of the dissertation is as follows. Part I is comprised of this general introduction (Chapter 1), followed by a specific introduction to the MSA/Bh itself (Chapter 2), which will discuss such issues as the text's structure, contents, date, authorship, and relation to other texts. Part II will focus on key soteriological terms that are elucidated in the text. It is comprised of the following chapters: Chapter 3 on *gotra* (spiritual lineage), Chapter 4 on *vimukti* (liberation), Chapter 5 on *nirvāṇa*, Chapter 6 on *bodhi* (awakening), and Chapter 7 on *buddhatva* (buddhahood). Each of these is discussed in order to establish the relations among important soteriological terms and the soteriological vehicles (*yāna*s). Part III then turns to a discussion of the soteriological vehicles themselves: Chapter 8 is a brief introduction to *yāna*-theories; Chapter 9 is on the *triyāna*—which encompasses the three traditional vehicles of the śrāvakayāna, pratyekabuddhayāna, and bodhisattvayāna; Chapter 10 is on the *ekayāna*—the one-vehicle doctrine; Chapter 11 is on the *hīnayāna*; and Chapter 12 is on the *mahāyāna*. Part IV contains an analysis of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction constructed by the

MSA/Bh. The analysis, in three parts, is concerned with tracing out some implications of the MSA/Bh's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in terms of some relevant ontological, epistemological, and soteriological considerations (Chapters 13 to 15, respectively). The aim of this analysis is to indicate how the text's construction of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction relates to some broader concerns with which the text is involved. Chapter 16 then concludes the dissertation with a more general discussion of and reflection on the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in the MSA/Bh.

I would like to conclude this general introduction with some comments on just what I think the MSA/Bh is doing in constructing a Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction. The MSA (as the title *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* itself indicates) was composed from a Mahāyāna perspective. Again, we may broadly characterized the Mahāyāna as a movement within Buddhism that began (or, at least, is first evidenced) some four to five centuries after the time of the historical Buddha. Given that the Mahāyāna arose within a context of already established forms of Buddhism, the Mahāyāna would eventually attempt to establish its identity through distinguishing itself from other (non-Mahāyāna) forms of Buddhism. While such a process of self-definition may certainly occur at a number of levels (doctrinal, ritual, institutional, etc.), this dissertation will only focus on the way in which this process was carried out at the conceptual-doctrinal level for one specific text. Thus I view the MSA/Bh's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction as an attempt to identify just what the Mahāyāna is, through specifying how it differs from other forms of Buddhism, which it labels Hīnayāna. Furthermore, the MSA/Bh aims to establish the Mahāyāna as the premier Buddhist soteriological vehicle—to establish the Mahāyāna as

superior to Hīnayāna forms of Buddhism. One primary way in which the text attempts to do this is through claiming that the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna lead to different soteriological goals, and that the goals of the Mahāyāna are superior to those of the Hīnayāna. For example, according to the MSA/Bh, while the Hīnayāna leads to individual nirvāṇa, the Mahāyāna leads to buddhahood, which the text views as superior to nirvāṇa.

One way to characterize the MSA/Bh's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction is to say that from the perspective of the text, the Hīnayāna may be understood as a therapeutic vehicle, while the Mahāyāna may be understood as a metaphysical vehicle. In terms of the definition of soteriology offered above, the MSA/Bh generally characterizes the Hīnayāna as a form of therapy: the Hīnayāna is a means for eradicating the general condition of suffering; and insofar as the Hīnayāna is primarily directed towards eradicating the condition of suffering, it may be characterized as a therapeutic vehicle. The Mahāyāna, on the other hand, has broader goals according to the MSA/Bh: the Mahāyāna is not only directed towards the eradication of the condition of suffering; it is also directed towards the attainment of perfect knowledge (omniscience), an attainment that the text assimilates to the realization or attainment of reality itself (i.e., not only *understanding* reality, but also *becoming synonymous* with it as a whole). And insofar as the Mahāyāna is interpreted as directed towards the attainment of reality itself, in the context of the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna may be characterized as a metaphysical vehicle.

A final note on perspectives: Parts II and III of this study are exegetical in nature, attempting to present the point of view of the MSA/Bh; thus claims made in those parts

should be understood as claims which I attribute to the MSA/Bh. In Parts II and III, then, I will restrict comments from my own point of view to the final section of each of the chapters that comprise them.

Chapter 2
Introduction to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*

The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (MSA) is an Indian Buddhist, Sanskrit verse-text composed probably sometime during the fourth century CE. It is often accompanied by the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya* (MSABh), a Sanskrit prose commentary which I also take to be from the fourth century. This dissertation will be a study of both the MSA and the MSABh taken together.[1] The MSA/Bh has traditionally been associated with the Yogācāra, considered to be one of the major forms of Mahāyāna philosophy.[2] In this chapter I will offer an analysis of the structure and contents of the text, and I will discuss such issues as the text's authorship and date, its relation to other texts, and its Yogācāra affiliation. I will conclude with some reflections on the general nature of the text. I begin with an overview of the texts, editions, and translations of the MSA-corpus.

The MSA-corpus

The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* is a verse-text of some 804 verses, of which only 794 verses are extant in Sanskrit.[3] However, this verse-text appears as an independent

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1. When referring to both the verse-text and the prose commentary together, I will use the abbreviation MSA/Bh. Throughout this dissertation, by the term "the text" I mean the MSA and the MSABh taken together, by "the verse-text" I mean the MSA, and by "the commentary" I mean the MSABh.

2. It is, for example, listed in the *sems tsam* (*Cittamātra*, another term for the Yogācāra) section of the Derge Tanjur (see Ui et al. 1934: 609) and in the *Yuga* (*Yu k'ie*, or Yoga) section of the Taishō edition of the Chinese canon (see Demiéville et al. 1978: 136).

3. The following verses are not found in Lévi's Sanskrit edition: MSA 2.4-11, MSA 11.51, and MSA 11.69. There are also two verses that are only partially available in Lévi's edition: MSA 11.5 and MSA 12.7. Also, it should be noted that while Lévi's edition indicates that MSA, Chapter 10, has fourteen verses, Nagao (1958: xiii), following the Tibetan text, states that it should have fifteen verses: according to

text only in the Tibetan canon. Normally the verse-text is accompanied by (embedded in) an extended prose commentary known as the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya*, which divides the verse-text into 21 chapters. There are also two Indian subcommentaries to the text, both of which are extant only in Tibetan. Specific texts, editions, and translations of the MSA-corpus are indicated below.[4]

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (MSA) / Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya (MSABh)

Sanskrit: the MSA is extant in Sanskrit only as embedded in the MSABh, not as an independent text. There are two Sanskrit editions of the MSA/Bh, both of which are based on a manuscript recovered by Lévi. This manuscript has a few lacunae, the most notable of which begins after MSA 2.3 and continues until the last lines of MSABh ad 2.11. Griffiths (1990b: 42) notes that what is probably a copy of this manuscript is available on microfiche at the Institute for Advanced Studies in World Religions in Stony Brook, New York (manuscript no. MBB-1-83). The two Sanskrit editions are as follows:

Sylvain Lévi, ed. 1907. Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṃkāra, vol. 1. Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion.

Sitansusekhar Bagchi, ed. 1970. Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṅkāra of Asaṅga. Dharbhanga, Bihar: Mithila Institute.

Lévi's edition is the principal text used in this study, since this is the earliest edition based on the most complete Sanskrit manuscript of the text available. All the translations in this dissertation are my own. Before each translated section, I offer the Sanskrit text based on Lévi's edition; the only change I have introduced is the minor orthographic one of providing a double-t in words such as *tattva* and *sattva*. Bagchi's edition

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this reading, the three lines of commentary to MSA 10.9 constitute an independent verse in *śikhariṇī* meter. Thus the MSA would be comprised of 805, rather than 804, verses. In any case, there is some evidence that the text has not come down to us in its most complete form: while MSABh intro ad 18.1 states that there will be sixteen verses on the topic of modesty (*lajjā*), in actuality only fifteen verses address this topic, so one verse appears to be lost. And while MSABh intro ad 19.48 states that there will be ten verses on the topic of the way things really are (*yathā-bhūta*), in actuality there are only nine. In the former case, however, the Tibetan text does contain lines that may be construed as the missing verse; see Lévi 1911: 225, Nagao 1958: xix, and Bagchi 1970: 128.

4. In listing translations, I have only given those that contain at least an entire chapter of the MSA.

is based on Lévi's, but it adds corrigenda to the text in order to clarify "the ambiguity and obscurity which impede the intelligibility of the text" (1970: 21).

Other incomplete manuscripts of the text in Sanskrit have also been located, edited, and published in Japan. Only the following one was available to me.[5]

Funahashi Naoya. 1985. Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra (Chapters I, II, III, IX, X): Revised on the Basis of Nepalese Manuscripts. Tokyo: Kokushokankokai, Ltd.

Where the reading offered by Funahashi significantly differs from that given by Lévi, I have noted it in the Sanskrit text preceding the particular translated section.

Tibetan: the MSA does occur as an independent text in the Tibetan canon.[6] However, it should be noted that the translators of the MSA and the MSABh are the same. Furthermore it is not uncommon to find a verse-text and its commentary listed as independent texts in the Tibetan canon, even if both were composed by the same person. Thus the fact that the MSA is listed independently should not be taken as evidence that the text was circulated independently (i.e., without the MSABh).

Derge 4020: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan ces bya ba'i tshig le'ur byas pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-nāma-kārikā]. Author: Byams pa [Maitreya]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: Sde dge bstan 'gyur [Derge Tanjur: DT] sems tsam [Cittamātra] PHI 1b1-39a4.

Peking 5521: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi tshig le'ur byas pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-kārikā]. Author: Byams pa mgon po [Maitreya-nātha]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: Peking bstan 'gyur [Peking Tanjur: PT] vol. 108: 1-19.

The Tibetan canon also includes the MSABh, which contains both the verse-text and the prose commentary itself.

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5. Also see the paragraph under the heading "Index" below.

6. For the Tibetan translations, I list their locations in both the Derge and Peking editions. The Derge edition no. for each text is according to the Tōhoku catalogue: see Ui et al. 1934. Also note that throughout this dissertation I will employ the Turrell Wylie system of transliteration for Tibetan.

Derge 4026: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya]. Author: Byang chub sems dpa' chen po rtogs pa rnam par byang ba [Vyavadātasamaya-mahābodhisattva]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: DT sems tsam PHI 129b1-260a7.

Peking 5527: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya]. Author: Byang chub sems dpa' chen po rtogs pa rnam par byang ba [Vyavadātasamaya-mahābodhisattva]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: PT vol. 108: 56-117.

Chinese: the MSA does not occur in the Chinese canon as an independent text. It is found only as embedded in the MSABh.

Taishō 1604: Daijōshōgongyōron [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra]. Author: Mujaku [Asaṅga]. Translator: Prabhākaramitra. Location: Taishō vol. XXXI, Yuga [Yoga] 2.[7]

In the preface to the second volume of his index to the MSA/Bh, Nagao (1961: vi) makes two important points regarding the Chinese version of the MSA/Bh. (1) In the Chinese version "we have many expressions which convey only the *meaning* but not the *word-form*" of the Sanskrit text. As an example, Nagao points out that whereas the original Sanskrit text has *śrāvaka-yāna-dharma*, the Chinese version gives the equivalent of *hīnayāna-sūtra*. (2) Nagao states that "the Chinese version often differs from the Sanskrit version in the length of the text, sometimes by omission, sometimes by addition." It should also be noted that the chapter divisions of the Chinese version are not exactly the same as those of the Sanskrit text; the Chinese has 24 (rather than 21) chapters, as a result of dividing certain Sanskrit chapters. I will not make any use of the differences between the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of the MSA/Bh. Rather, I will focus on the Sanskrit text, and in places supplement this with readings based on the Tibetan.

French: Lévi also published a complete French translation of the MSA/Bh.

Sylvain Lévi, trans. 1911. <u>Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṃkāra</u>, vol. 2. Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion.

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7. This information was drawn from the Hōbōgirin catalogue of the Taishō edition of the Chinese canon; see Demiéville et al. 1978.

English: one complete English translation of the MSA/Bh has been published to date. The text also contains a Sanskrit edition of the MSA/Bh, which I take to be based on Bagchi's edition, although this is not specified. The translation is not entirely reliable.

Surekha Vijay Limaye, trans. 1992. Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra. Delhi: Sri Satguru.

Index: Nagao has published a very useful two-volume index to the MSA/Bh. The first volume contains an index to Lévi's Sanskrit edition, and the second volume contains a Tibetan-Sanskrit and Chinese-Sanskrit index. In the first volume Nagao offers some corrigenda to Lévi's text, which he bases on the Tibetan and Chinese versions, Sthiramati's subcommentary, and Takeuchi Shōkō's "Manuscripts of the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*, excavated by the Otani Mission," Ryūkoku Daigaku Ronshū, No. 352, which was not available to me.

Nagao Gadjin. 1958-1961. Index to the Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṃkāra, 2 vols. Tokyo: Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkō-kai.

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya (MSAVBh)

Tibetan: although the MSAVBh was composed in Sanskrit, it is extant only in Tibetan translation. The MSAVBh is ostensibly a subcommentary to the MSA, in that it comments on both the MSA and the MSABh. However, in Nguyen's translation of MSAVBh, Chapter 9, the subcommentary only occasionally quotes and comments on the MSABh. The MSAVBh is quite long, extending to some 1094 folio-sides. The author of the MSAVBh is Sthiramati, a well-known scholar-monk associated with the monastic universities of Nālandā and Valabhī, who composed numerous commentaries to Yogācāra and other texts.[8] While Sthiramati's date cannot be fixed with certainty, Frauwallner and Kajiyama both offer rather strong arguments for fixing his date at 510-570 CE.[9] Thus the MSAVBh postdates the probable date of composition of the MSA/Bh by some two centuries.

Derge 4034: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi 'grel pa rgya cher bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya]. Author: Blo gros brtan

8. On Sthiramati's life, times, and works see Nguyen 1990: 13-83.

9. See Frauwallner 1961: 136-137 and Kajiyama 1968/1969: 193-203. Nguyen, however, is in favor of Ui's hypothesis for Sthiramati's date (470-550 CE): see Nguyen 1990: 21-23.

[Sthiramati]. Translators: Municandra and Lce bkra shis. Location: DT sems tsam MI 1b1-283a7, TSI 1b1-266a7.

Peking 5531: Theg pa chen po mdo sde'i rgyan gyi 'grel pa rgya cher bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya]. Author: Blo gros brtan [Sthiramati]. Translators: Municandra and Lce bkra shis. Location: PT vol. 108: 199-327, vol. 109: 1-125.

English: Nguyen's dissertation contains a study and translation of MSAVBh, Chapter 9, on *bodhi*. The dissertation also contains a useful discussion of Sthiramati's life and works.

Cuong Tu Nguyen. 1990. Sthiramati's Interpretation of Buddhology and Soteriology. PhD diss., Harvard University.

Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-ṭīkā (MSAT)

Tibetan: like the MSAVBh, the MSAT was also composed in Sanskrit, but is extant only in Tibetan. And like the MSAVBh, the MSAT is a subcommentary, commenting on both the MSA and the MSABh. However, Hakamaya (1971: 470-469) states that the MSAT quotes the MSABh more than the MSAVBh does. Nevertheless, according to Hakamaya, the MSAVBh and the MSAT are rather near to each other in their interpretations (1971: 465, 1978: 488). The MSAT is a little less than one-fourth the length of the MSAVBh, extending to 271 folio-sides. The author of the MSAT is identified as Ngo bo nyid med pa, which may be a translation of the Sanskrit name Asvabhāva or Niḥsvabhāva.[10] In his commentary to the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, Asvabhāva cites Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu*.[11] Following the date offered by Lindtner (1980) for Dharmakīrti (530-600 CE), this would mean that Asvabhāva would have been active during the second half of the sixth century CE. Thus the MSAT also postdates the probable date of composition of the MSA/Bh by some two centuries.

Derge 4029: Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde'i rgyan gyi rgya cher bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-ṭīkā]. Author: Ngo bo nyid med pa [Asvabhāva or Niḥsvabhāva]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: DT sems tsam BI 38b6-174a7.

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10. I will refer to the author of the MSAT as Asvabhāva.

11. See DT sems tsam RI 106a7-106b2. This was brought to my attention by Griffiths 1990b: 47.

Peking 5530: Theg pa chen po'i mdo sde'i rgyan gyi rgya cher bshad pa [Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-ṭīkā]. Author: Ngo bo nyid med pa [Asvabhāva or Niḥsvabhāva]. Translators: Śākyasiṃha and Dpal brtsegs. Location: PT vol. 108: 138-198.

While I will make a few references to the subcommentaries of Sthiramati and Asvabhāva (the MSAVBh and the MSAT, respectively), this dissertation intends to be a systematic study of the MSA and the MSABh. Thus my interpretive efforts will be focused on elucidating the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in the MSA/Bh.

Structure and contents

Since this dissertation will be a systematic study of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in both the MSA and the MSABh, here I will offer a detailed summary of the structure and contents of the MSA following that given by the MSABh.[12]

Chapter 1: Establishment of the Mahāyāna (*mahāyāna-siddhi*)
1-6: on the nature of the text[13]
7-21: apology for the Mahāyāna[14]

Chapter 2: Going for refuge (*śaraṇa-gamana*)
1-10. four reasons why taking refuge in the Mahāyāna is superior
11: analysis of refuge – its nature, cause, result, activity, endowment, and function
12: the greatness of taking refuge in the Mahāyāna

Chapter 3: Spiritual lineage (*gotra*)
1-10: analysis of spiritual lineage – its existence, pre-eminence, nature, indicators, divisions, hindrances, benefits, and analogies

12. While in most cases I am precisely following the MSABh's subdivisions, in some cases I have introduced my own subdivisions in order to coherently group together smaller subdivisions or independent verses.

13. These verses constitute an independent chapter in the Derge Tanjur edition of the MSA.

14. These verses also constitute an independent chapter in the Derge Tanjur edition of the MSA.

11: on the absence of spiritual lineage
12-13: the greatness of the spiritual lineage of bodhisattvas

<u>Chapter 4: Production of thought *(cittotpāda)*</u>
1-20: explanation of the production of the thought of awakening – its greatnesses, divisions, analysis, types, and analogies
21: on the absence of the production of the thought of awakening
22-28: the production of the thought of awakening in relation to bodhisattvas

<u>Chapter 5: Practice *(pratipatti)*</u>
1: six greatnesses of the practice of bodhisattvas
2-10: the benefit of oneself and others (*sva-parārtha*)
11: four greatnesses of the practice of bodhisattvas

<u>Chapter 6: Reality *(tattva)*</u>
1: the non-duality of the ultimate (*paramārtha*)
2-4: the absence of self
5: the non-distinction of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa
6-9: knowledge that is ultimate (*pāramārthika-jñāna*)
10: the greatness of knowledge that is ultimate

<u>Chapter 7: Power *(prabhāva)*</u>
1-8: the special powers of bodhisattvas
9: list of the special powers of bodhisattvas
10: the greatnesses of the powers of bodhisattvas

<u>Chapter 8: Maturation *(paripāka)*</u>
1-11: the nine forms of maturation of oneself
12-22: the eight forms of maturation of others

<u>Chapter 9: Awakening *(bodhi)*</u>
1-3: omniscience (*sarvākāra-jñatā*)
4-6: the non-duality of buddhahood
7-11: buddhahood as the supreme refuge
12-17: the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*)
18-21: the activity of buddhas
22-37: the profundity of the undefiled realm (*anāsrava-dhātu-gāmbhīrya*)
38-48: forms of mastery (*vibhutva*) of buddhas
49-55: the maturation of sentient beings
56-59: the purity of the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu-viśuddhi*)
60-66: the three embodiments of buddha (*buddha-kāya*)
67-76: the four awarenesses of buddha (*buddha-jñāna*)
77: buddha neither singular nor plural

78-81: the means to buddhahood
82-85: the mutual activity of buddhas
86: in praise of buddhahood

Chapter 10: Inclination (*adhimukti*)
1: summary of the topics of Chapters 1-9
2-13: explanation of inclination – its types, obstacles, benefits, analogies, and merits
14: the fruits of inclination towards the Mahāyāna

Chapter 11: Investigation of the dharma (*dharma-paryeṣṭi*)
1-4: the three *piṭaka*s – sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma
5-7: attainment of the basis (*ālambana*) of the dharma
8-12: the mental applications (*manasi-kāra*)
13-14: reality (*dharmatatva*)
15-30: comparison between reality (*tattva*) and illusion (*māyā*)
31: the objects of knowledge (*jñeya*)
32-33: the purification of afflictions (*kleśa*)
34-35: representation only (*vijñapti-mātra*)
36-43: the indicator, the indicated, and the process of indication – the indicator (*lakṣaṇa*) is discussed in terms of the three characteristics
44-49: liberation (*vimukti*)
50-51: the absence of nature of phenomena (*dharma-niḥsvabhāvatva*)
52: certainty of the non-arising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*)
53-59: the single vehicle (*ekayāna*)
60: the five sciences
61-73: the mental applications
74-75: the divisions of the investigation of the dharma
76: the causality of the dharma
77: conceptual discrimination (*vikalpa*)
78: the three greatnesses of investigation

Chapter 12: Teaching (*deśanā*)
1-15: the characteristics of the teaching
16-17: the four indirect implications (*abhisaṃdhi*)
18: the four indirect intentions (*abhiprāya*)
19-23: teachings for bodhisattvas who are indefinite (*aniyata*)
24: the benefits of teaching

Chapter 13: Practice (*pratipatti*)
1-6: realizations of the practice of bodhisattvas
7-10: conduct and qualities of bodhisattvas
11-13: methods of realization for bodhisattvas

14-15: differences between bodhisattvas and Hīnayāna arhats
16-19: the fundamental purity of mind
20-28: analogies for bodhisattvas and their practice
29: concluding verse

Chapter 14: Instruction and guidance (*avavādānuśāsanī*)
1-3: the instruction of buddhas
4-22: mundane attainments [the path of accumulation]
23-27: the four aids to penetration (*nirvedha-bhāgīya*) [the path of application]
28-41: the path of vision
42-46: the path of cultivation
47-49: the greatness of instruction
50: the four forms of guidance
51: concluding verse

Chapter 15: Action associated with means (*upāya-sahita-karma*)
1-5: analysis of the acts of bodhisattvas

Chapter 16: Perfections (*pāramitā*)
1: introductory verse
2-7: the number of perfections
8-13: the characteristics of the perfections
14: the sequence of the perfections
15: the etymology of the perfections
16: the cultivation of the perfections
17-28: analysis of the perfections – in terms of nature, cause, result, activity, endowment, and function
29: the summary of the perfections
30-35: the obstacles to the perfections
36-63: the virtues of the perfections
64-70: analysis of the perfection of energy (*vīrya*)
71: the mutual influence of the perfections
72-79: the collection of the perfections

Chapter 17: Homage, service, and the immeasurables (*pūjā-sevā 'pramāṇa*)
1-8: analysis of homage to buddhas
9-16: service of a spiritual friend (*kalyāṇa-mitra*)
17-28: the four immeasurables – kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity
29-64: analysis of compassion
65-66: concluding verses

Chapter 18: Aids to awakening (*bodhipakṣa*)
1-15: analysis of modesty (*lajjā*)
16-22: analysis of firmness (*dhṛti*)
23-24: the absence of lassitude (*akheda*)
25-26: knowledge of treatises
27-30: knowledge of the world
31-33: analysis of the four supports (*pratisaraṇa*) of the dharma
34-37: analysis of the special knowledges (*pratisaṃvid*)
38-41: analysis of the provisions of merit and knowledge (*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*)
42-44: the four applications of awareness (*smṛtyupasthāna*)
45-49: the four right exertions (*samyak-prahāṇa*)
50-54: the four bases of supernormal powers (*ṛddhi-pāda*)
55: the five faculties (*indriya*)
56: the five powers (*bala*)
57-63: the seven limbs of awakening (*bodhyaṅga*)
64-65: the noble eightfold path
66-68: calmness and insight (*śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*)
69-70: skill in means (*upāya-kauśalya*)
71-73: the analysis of formulae (*dhāraṇī*)
74-76: the analysis of vows (*praṇidhāna*)
77-79: the analysis of concentrations (*samādhi*)
80-81: summaries of the dharma
82-91: the doctrine of momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*)
92-103: the doctrine of the absence of self in persons
104: concluding verse

Chapter 19: Virtues (*guṇa*)
1-42: analyses of various virtues
43-46: the analysis of designations (*prajñapti-vyavasthāna*)
47: the analysis of investigation
48-56: ascertainment in accordance with the way things really are (*yathā-bhūta-parijñāna*)
57-58: the results of the teaching
59-60: the seven greatnesses of the Mahāyāna
61-62: the summary of the Mahāyāna
63-80: on bodhisattvas

Chapter 20: Conduct (*caryā*)
1-8: the conduct of bodhisattvas
9-40: analysis of the bodhisattva-stage – their subdivisions, attainments, and etymology
41-42: concluding verses

Chapter 21: Dedication (*pratiṣṭhā*)
43-61:[15] in praise of buddhahood

As Lévi (1911: 10-11) pointed out, the structure of the MSA corresponds quite closely to that of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the fifteenth *bhūmi* of the basic section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. Following the analysis of the contents of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (BBh) given by Dutt's edition (1966), we may arrive at the following list of topical correspondences between the MSA and the BBh:[16]

MSA	BBh
1. *mahāyāna-siddhi*	(no corresponding section)
2. *śaraṇa-gamana*	(no corresponding section)
	Book I
3. *gotra*	1. *gotra*
4. *cittotpāda*	2. *cittotpāda*
5. *pratipatti*[17]	3. *sva-parārtha*
6. *tattva*	4. *tattvārtha*
7. *prabhāva*	5. *prabhāva*
8. *paripāka*	6. *paripāka*
9. *bodhi*	7. *bodhi*
	8. *bala-gotra* contains sections on:
10. *adhimukti*	*adhimukti*
11. *dharma-paryeṣṭi*	*dharma-paryeṣṭi*
12. *deśanā*	*deśanā*
13. *pratipatti*	*pratipatti*
14. *avavādānuśāsanī*	*avavādānuśāsana*
15. *upāya-sahita-karma*	*upāya-sahita-kāya-vaṅ-manaḥ-karma*
16. *pāramitā*	

15. Note that the numbering of the verses in Chapter 21 is continuous with that of Chapter 20 since these two chapters are not separated in the manuscript upon which Lévi based his edition. Nevertheless Lévi's separation of Chapter 20 from 21 is certainly justifiable: the manuscript numbers Chapters 1 through 15 and Chapter 21, but only four chapters are marked between Chapters 15 and 21. Thus the final chapter should be divided into two.

16. I will offer the chapter titles of each text in Sanskrit for comparison. English translations of these chapter titles may be found in the list of contents of the MSA given above.

17. See the topic of MSA 5.2-10 from the list of contents above: *sva-parārtha*.

–	9. *dāna*
–	10. *śīla*
–	11. *kṣānti*
–	12. *vīrya*
–	13. *dhyāna*
–	14. *prajñā*
(16.72-79: *saṃgraha-vastu*)	15. *saṃgraha-vastu*
17. *pūjā-sevā 'pramāṇa*	16. *pūjā-sevā 'pramāṇa*
18. *bodhipakṣa*	17. *bodhipakṣya*
19. *guṇa*	18. *bodhisattva-guṇa*
	Book II
(20.1-2: *liṅga*)	1. *bodhisattva-liṅga* – marks of a bodhisattva
(20.3-5: *gṛhi-pravrajita-pakṣa*)	2. *pakṣa* – concerning lay and monastic bodhisattvas
(20.6: *adhyāśaya*)	3. *adhyāśaya* – intentions
(20.9-40: *vihāra-bhūmi*)	4. *vihāra* – stages
	Book III
(20.8: *upapatti*)	1. *upapatti* – rebirths
(20.7: *parigraha*)	2. *parigraha* – adoption of sentient beings
(20.32-40: *bhūmi-nirukti*)	3. *bhūmi*
(20.42: *caryā*)	4. *caryā*
(21.49: *lakṣaṇānuvyañjana*)	5. *lakṣaṇānuvyañjana* – the major and minor marks of a great being
21. *pratiṣṭhā*	6. *pratiṣṭhā*

The degree of structural correspondence between the MSA and the BBh is quite remarkable. With a few minor exceptions, both follow a nearly identical pattern in terms of the topics that are discussed and the order in which they are discussed. It should be emphasized, however, that the two are not as similar in their contents: although both discuss the same topics, the ways in which those topics are discussed often differ. For example, the BBh's chapter on *bodhi* makes no mention of many of the terms and concepts found in the MSA's chapter on *bodhi*: e.g., the BBh's discussion of *bodhi*

makes no mention of the embodiments of buddha (*buddha-kāya*) or the awarenesses of buddha (*buddha-jñāna*), two concepts that play an important role in the MSA's buddhalogical discourse. Nevertheless, the structural similarity between the MSA and the BBh is noteworthy.

While I will discuss the possible relationship between the MSA and the BBh below, here I would like to focus on the issue of the structure of the MSA using the structure of the BBh as a starting point. The BBh is divided into three books: Book I corresponds structurally to MSA, Chapters 3-19; Book II corresponds roughly to MSA, Chapter 20; and Book III corresponds to select verses from MSA, Chapter 20, and to Chapter 21. The BBh does not offer much explanation of its own particular structure; in fact, Books II and III begin straightaway with the concerns of their respective first chapters. At the beginning of Book I, however, the BBh does make a statement regarding the general topics of the text (Sanskrit edition, Dutt 1966: 1):

> daśeme dharmāḥ sa-phalasya bodhisattva-mārgasya mahāyānasya saṃgrahāya saṃvartante/ katame daśa/ ādhāro liṅgaṃ pakṣo 'dhyāśayo vihāra upapattiḥ parigraho bhūmiś caryā pratiṣṭhā ca/
>
> There are ten elements which summarize the Mahāyāna, the path of the bodhisattva, along with its result. What are the ten? Support, mark, position, intention, abode, rebirth, adoption, stage, conduct, and dedication.

From the list of contents given earlier, it may be noted that the first term in this tenfold list, "support" (*ādhāra*), is the topic of Book I of the BBh, while the following nine terms form the topics of Books II and III. Thus Book I is concerned with the "support" of the bodhisattva path—with that which "holds it up"—and from the chapter titles of Book I, we may infer that the "support" of the bodhisattva path means the practices and

attainments of a bodhisattva. It should also be noted that BBh, Book I, structurally corresponds to a substantial portion of the MSA (Chapters 3-19). Thus, if we were to use the BBh as a structural model for the MSA, we might say that a substantial part of the MSA deals with the support of the bodhisattva path, or with the practices and attainments of a bodhisattva.

Another structural issue to be considered is that the final chapter of the MSA (Chapter 21: *pratiṣṭhā*, dedication — verse-text only) may also be found in two other locations: (1) as an independent text in the Tibetan canon (Derge 1115); and (2) as Chapter 10.10-27 of the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*.[18] While I will argue below that the MSA is earlier than the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, the relation between the MSA and the independent text is unclear. Griffiths et al. (1989: 128) point out that the independent text (title: *Chos kyi sku la gnas pa'i yon tan la bstod pa*) was translated into Tibetan by the same persons that translated the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, and that the translation of the independent text is nearly identical with the translation of the verses that appears in the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, but different from the translation that appears in the MSA.

Turning to internal structural clues, perhaps the most significant structural feature of the MSA is that a break or fissure seems to occur between Chapters 9 and 10. In fact the first verse of Chapter 10 is a résumé of Chapters 1 to 9. (No other verse in the verse-text acts as a résumé to previous or subsequent chapters.) Furthermore, Chapters 5 through 9 each focus on one of a standard Yogācāra set of five trainings that bodhisattvas

18. See Lamotte 1973, vol. 1: 88-90; trans. vol. 2: 290-306. Griffiths et al. 1989: 128-169 also contains an English translation.

are said to undertake—the *śikṣālambanas*.[19] If we consider Chapters 1 to 4 to be introductory, then the verse-text would have a rather unified structure up through Chapter 9: it would introduce and discuss the *śikṣālambanas*. Thus there is a sense in which the first part of the MSA (Chapters 1-9) seems to comprise a somewhat independent and coherent whole.

A second internal issue to be considered is the variety of meters used in the verse-text of the MSA. While *anuṣṭubh* and *āryā* are the most commonly used meters, many others are also employed (*indravajrā*, *upendravajrā*, etc.).[20] Davidson (1985: 133) states that it is possible to independently read the *anuṣṭubh* verses as a coherent text in and of itself, which suggests that the verses composed in this meter form a separate (and early) stratum of the received verse-text.[21] Davidson's idea is, I think, an interesting one: one can see many places in which the *anuṣṭubh* verses form a coherent section within a chapter, and other cases in which verses in other meters recapitulate and comment on *anuṣṭubh* verses.[22] Nevertheless, the verse-text would be quite disjointed—shifting

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19. These five trainings and their correspondences to the structure of the text are discussed further in Chapter 12 of this study. Briefly they are: *sva-parārtha* (MSA, Chapter 5), *tattvārtha* (Chapter 6), *prabhāva* (Chapter 7), *paripācana* (Chapter 8), and *bodhi* (Chapter 9); this list is drawn from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Sanskrit edition, Dutt 1966: 15).

20. For a complete list, see Lévi 1911: *11-*12.

21. The *anuṣṭubh* verses are as follows: MSA 1.8-13; MSA 3.1-10; MSA 4.1-6; MSA 9.1-2, 4-5, 7-8, 11, 16-48, 56-81; MSA 10.4-9, 11-13; MSA 11.5-12, 15-29, 31-33, 35-46, 49-50, 53-59, 61-68, 70-73; MSA 12.7, 16-18; MSA 13.1-13, 16, 20-21, 24-28; MSA 14.1-36, 42-46; MSA 15.1; MSA 16.16-28, 42, 52-57, 72-78; MSA 17.1-7, 9, 19, 29-30, 63-64; MSA 18.16-104; MSA 19.1-63, 73-74; MSA 20-21.1-14, 17-24, 26-28, 31-61.

22. See, for example, MSA 9.3 (in relation to 9.1-2) and 9.6 (in relation to 9.4-5).

abruptly from one topic to another—if the non-*anuṣṭubh* verses were omitted.[23] Furthermore, the first *anuṣṭubh* verse (MSA 1.8) is actually a response to an objection raised to a point made in MSA 1.7; that is to say, this *anuṣṭubh* verse only makes sense in the context of a discussion that begins in a previous, non-*anuṣṭubh* verse.[24] Thus there are problems involved with reading the *anuṣṭubh* verses as a coherent, independent unit.

While none of the factors discussed regarding the structure of the MSA independently demonstrate that the MSA is a compilation, when considered together they do weigh towards the hypothesis that the received verse-text is at least partially so.[25] While the available evidence does not allow for a conclusive determination, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the MSA was constructed from more than one source, and that the received verse-text involves more than one composer. My hypothesis is that earlier strata of the MSA were compiled, redacted, added to, and commented upon by one person. I take the result of this process to be the received text of the MSA/Bh.

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23. For example, MSA, Chapter 10, on inclination (*adhimukti*), would begin with a discussion of the obstacles to inclination rather than with an explanation of inclination; Chapter 15 would contain only one verse, with no further development; and Chapter 12, on teaching (*deśanā*), would contain only one verse on teaching, then abruptly shift to a discussion of the indirect implications and intentions.

24. The same situation also occurs with the *anuṣṭubh* verses at MSA 1.9 and 1.12.

25. By "compilation" I mean a text which was constructed from various sources authored by different individuals or by different groups of individuals; I use the term to distinguish such texts from texts which are primarily considered to be the work of one individual or of a group of individuals working together. Here it should also be noted that the category of a compilation is not of immediate concern to Indian

Authorship

A number of hypotheses have been offered regarding the authorship of the MSA and the MSABh. Though the literature on this issue has become quite extensive, no conclusive results have been reached. I will discuss the various hypotheses and offer a summary of the evidence for each. I begin with the most "numinous" candidate.

(1) Maitreya — the colophon of the Derge Tanjur edition of the MSA states that the verse-text was composed by Maitreya (*Byams pa*), the future buddha of this world-realm.[26] According to Tāranātha, Asaṅga was transported to the Tuṣita heaven, where he listened to five important treatises composed by Maitreya; after a period of time (variously given as six months to fifty years), Asaṅga returned to the world and proclaimed these texts.[27] Bu ston lists the five Maitreya-texts as follows: *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, *Uttaratantra* (also known as *Ratnagotravibhāga*), and *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*.[28] Early Tibetan Buddhist

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Buddhist intellectuals; such a category represents the concerns of a historical-critical methodology that is a focus of modern western intellectuals.

26. DT sems tsam PHI 39a2. Note that the Peking Tanjur edition of the MSA identifies Maitreyanātha (*Byams pa mgon po*; the Lord Maitreya) as the composer.

27. For a translation of this tradition, see Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990: 158-161. Tāranātha was a Tibetan historian writing in the early seventeenth century; thus this tradition is quite far removed from any purported historical event.

28. See Obermiller 1987: 53-54 for a translation of this passage; Stcherbatskoi 1905: 146-148 provides a French translation. Bu ston was writing in the fourteenth century. Note that Ui (1928: 221) also identifies a Chinese tradition of the "five treatises of Maitreya," although the list of the five texts is different; they are the *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Yogavibhāga* (lost), *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, and a commentary to the *Vajracchedikā*; this tradition is found in Tun lun's commentary to the *Yogācārabhūmi* (Davidson 1985: 48, note 64, identifies the location). Ui states that this tradition is later than the time of the disciples of Hsüan tsang.

catalogues, however, make no mention of the tradition of the five Maitreya-texts.[29] Nevertheless, a connection between Asaṅga and Maitreya may be found as early as the sixth century CE in India: Sthiramati's subcommentary to the *Madhyāntavibhāga* states that Maitreya was the composer (*praṇetṛ*) of the text, while Asaṅga was its proclaimer (*vaktṛ*).[30] And in the seventh century CE, Hsüan tsang writes that Asaṅga received the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, and other texts from Maitreya.[31] Thus a possible Indian tradition of the Maitreyan authorship—and Asaṅgan promulgation—of the MSA may be dated to the early seventh century.

Ui has argued that the bodhisattva Maitreya should be distinguished from a historical person of the same name.[32] Ui argues that the historical Maitreya was the teacher of Asaṅga, and that he composed at least six works that have normally been attributed to Asaṅga, including the MSA. Ui, however, does not offer much positive

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29. See Lalou 1953, which is an edition of the Ldan kar catalogue of the Tibetan canon from about the time of Khri srong lde btsan (reigned during the second half of the eight century CE); it does not even list the *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga* or the *Uttaratantra* (*Ratnagotravibhāga*). Davidson (1985: 37) states that perhaps the earliest Tibetan reference to the "five treatises of Maitreya" is in the writings of Rje btsun grags pa rgyal mtshan (1147-1216).

30. See Pandeya 1971: 3-4. Furthermore, Ui (1929: 95) reports that Bodhiruci, who traveled to China in 506 CE, states that Maitreya composed the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and a commentary to the *Vajracchedikā*, and taught them to Asaṅga. Paramārtha (499-569 CE), in his *Life of Vasubandhu*, also reports that Asaṅga received certain texts from Maitreya; see Takakusu 1904: 273-275. Note that none of these sources, however, specifically mentions either the MSA or the category of the "five treatises of Maitreya."

31. For a translation, see Beal 1906, vol. 1: 226. Hsüan tsang left China in 629 and returned in 645. Ostensibly this attribution of authorship was gathered during his travels through India, since it is recorded in the section of the text dealing with his visit to Ayodhyā.

32. The purported historical person is sometimes referred to as Maitreyanātha, in order to distinguish him from the bodhisattva. While Tucci (1930) initially supported the view of the historicity of Maitreyanātha, later (1956: 14, note 1) he stated that Demiéville's study (1954) had settled the issue against Maitreyanātha's historicity. Frauwallner (1956: 296) argues for the historicity of Maitreyanātha. Schmithausen (1976: 243) refers to Maitreyanātha as the author of the MSA, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, and *Madhyāntavibhāga*.

evidence in support of his position (although he offers substantial evidence against the attribution of authorship to Asaṅga, which will be treated below). In perhaps the most significant paragraph of the essay, Ui (1929: 96) states:

> Tāranātha's tales, mythological as they are, give similar traditions as to Maitreya's instruction, Asaṅga's lecture and his compilation of *śāstras*. These three traditions [viz., Bodhiruci, Paramārtha, and Hsüan tsang] agree in substance, making Asaṅga receive instruction from Maitreya. But who is Maitreya, a teacher or a Bodhisattva? Naturally we had to presume that the tradition would contain an historical fact, and Maitreya was the actual teacher of Asaṅga.

Ui's argument for the historical existence of Maitreya rests on the assumption that traditions *must* contain some historical fact. There is, however, no compelling reason to believe this: a traditional attribution of authorship may be more concerned with emphasizing the importance of a text than with establishing historical details. In fact, we may view the attribution of the MSA to Maitreya in terms of Davidson's plausible hypothesis (1985: 39-41) of a general Indian Buddhist trend to move texts back in time, situate them in a divine locale, and identify them with persons of greater authority.

Demiéville's study of the *Yogācārabhūmi* of Saṅgharakṣa (1954) is one of the more important contributions to the debate about the historicity of Maitreya. Demiéville identifies a number of traditions, beginning in the fourth century CE in Kaśmīra, which state that certain Buddhist teachers were transported to Tuṣita in order to consult with and receive teachings from Maitreya.[33] On the basis of the number of such traditions, and the

33. See Demiéville 1954, especially: 369-387. Hsüan tsang includes many references to the cult of Maitreya: in addition to his account of Asaṅga's reception of texts from Maitreya, he offers two accounts of persons being transported to Tuṣita to enter Maitreya's presence; see Beal 1904, vol. 1: 134 and vol. 2: 228.

general religious and literary tendency to identify a divine figure as the inspirational source of a text, Demiéville holds that it is unnecessary to posit Maitreya's historicity.[34]

(2) Asaṅga — the Chinese canon identifies Asaṅga as the composer of the MSA and the MSABh.[35] This identification is first found in Li pai yao's preface to the Chinese version of the text (although Prabhākaramitra was the translator of the text, Li pai yao later wrote the preface).[36] But according to Ui (1928: 215) and Keenan (1980: 152), Li pai yao's preface states that Asaṅga *compiled* (Ui gives the term *tsuan* in Chinese) the text, not that he *composed* it (the corresponding term here, according to Ui, would be *tsao*). Thus Ui concludes that it is unlikely that Asaṅga was the original composer. Ui (1929: 100) also argues that in a work that has been less controversially attributed to Asaṅga, the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, Asaṅga quotes a number of texts—including the MSA—which Ui says should be attributed to Maitreya. It is admittedly difficult to sort out issues of authorship and chronology on the basis of quotations alone, since the distinction between the "original text" and the work of redactors may be quite unclear. But if the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* is the work of one composer (on the face of it this is a plausible hypothesis: the text does have a sufficiently high level of structural coherence), and if Asaṅga is the composer (again, this is plausible: all of the traditional sources, including the colophon of the text itself, attest to Asaṅga's authorship), then it is certainly

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34. He views such a position as a symptom of *la manie historiciste*; see Demiéville 1954: 381, note 4.

35. The colophon of the Chinese version of the MSA/Bh, however, agrees with the colophons of the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions in identifying Vyavadātasamaya as the speaker of the text: see Lévi 1911: *7.

36. Ui (1928: 215) states that Prabhākaramitra completed the translation in 630-632 CE, and that the text was presented to the Emperor in 633, along with Li pai yao's preface.

reasonable to hypothesize that the MSA belongs to a period before Asaṅga's time, since the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* quotes the MSA as an authoritative text.[37]

It should be noted that certain recent works dealing with the MSA—e.g., Bagchi 1970, Limaye 1992, and Shastri 1989—refer to Asaṅga as the composer of the text, even in their titles. This is probably largely due to Lévi's attribution, and should not be taken as further evidence for Asaṅga's authorship.

(3) Vasubandhu — K'uei chi, a pupil of Hsüan tsang, states that Vasubandhu composed the commentary to the MSA (Ui 1928: 220). Bu ston and Tāranātha also state this (respectively, Obermiller 1987: 57 and Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990: 172). Ui (1928: 222) affirmed this view, but later concurred that it is open to question (1929: 99), given that other traditions (e.g., the Chinese canon) identify Asaṅga as the composer of the MSABh.

(4) Vyavadātasamaya — the colophons of the Sanskrit text of MSA/Bh as well as the Tibetan and Chinese versions all identify the *mahābodhisattva* Vyavadātasamaya as the one by whom the text was spoken (*bhāṣita*). It is unclear whether Vyavadātasamaya is here referred to as the composer of the MSA (verse-text only) or of both the MSA and the MSABh. To further complicate matters, both the Derge and Peking editions of the Tibetan canon identify Vyavadātasamaya as the author of the MSABh only, but this

37. The *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* quotes the following texts by name: *Mahāyānābhidharma-sūtra* (Lamotte 1973, vol. 1: 1; this text is no longer extant; see Keenan 1980: 142-147), *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* (Lamotte 1973, vol. 1: 4), *Ekottarāgama* (ibid., 7), *Madhyāntavibhāga* (ibid., 13), *Daśabhūmika* (ibid., 26), *Yogavibhāga* (ibid., 56; this text is no longer extant; a Chinese tradition identifies it as one of the five treatises of Maitreya; see note 28 above), and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* (ibid., 56; the text also anonymously quotes the MSA numerous times; in fact, the MSA is the text most often quoted by the *Mahāyāna-*

information cannot be derived from the colophon itself. Ruegg (1969: 40) states that the name Vyavadātasamaya is only an epithet (*une simple épithète*), and not the proper name of the author, but given that the names of many Indian Buddhist authors may be understood as epithets, I do not see the strength of this point. Regarding the title *mahābodhisattva*, Demiéville (1954: 373) states that a number of patriarchs of the Sarvāstivāda sect in Kaśmīra were given the title *bodhisattva*, hence it is possible that a certain Vyavadātasamaya was coming out of this, or a similar, milieu.

While others have attempted to reconcile the colophon with traditions that posit a more renowned figure to be the composer of the MSA and/or the MSABh, no compelling arguments have been presented in favor of adopting one of those (contradictory) traditions over the uniform evidence of the manuscripts of the text itself. While it must be acknowledged that no conclusive evidence has thus far been presented regarding the authorship of the MSA and the MSABh, it is reasonable to refer to Vyavadātasamaya as the one who compiled and redacted earlier strata of the MSA, added to them, and composed the prose commentary to the verse-text. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to affirming Vyavadātasamaya as the final redactor/author is the fact that he is a figure unknown to traditional and contemporary scholarship outside of the reference in this colophon. This problem, however, is resolvable if we hypothesize that relatively early in the text's history, the MSA/Bh was taken to be of central importance in certain Buddhist circles (perhaps in Kaśmīra) and thus associated with the Maitreya-Asaṅga complex. In

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saṃgraha). From this list, it can be seen that Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* places the MSA in the company of a rather authoritative body of works.

any case, this is only a hypothesis with limited evidence. So while it is not unreasonable to refer to Vyavadātasamaya as the final redactor/author of the received text of the MSA/Bh, throughout this dissertation I will not name any specific person as the final redactor/author.

Relation to other texts

Regardless of the question of authorship, which in any case is unable to be conclusively settled given the presently available evidence, we can situate the text within a larger corpus of Indian Buddhist Sanskrit texts circulating or produced from c. the fourth century CE to c. the sixth century CE. Aside from the subcommentaries discussed above, Indian Buddhist texts related to the MSA/Bh may be divided into three general categories: (1) texts referred to or quoted in the MSABh (the verse-text itself does not specifically refer to any other text); (2) texts that refer to or quote the MSA; and (3) texts which share significant, specific characteristics with the MSA/Bh, such as authorship (or attributed authorship), the use of a specific technical terminology, and/or structure. Correlating the lists offered by Lévi (1911: *14), Nagao (1958: 285), and Bagchi (1970: 19-20), we may arrive at the following list of texts which are specifically referred to or quoted by name in the MSABh:

name of text	location in the MSABh	comments[38]
Akṣayamati-sūtra	ad 4.20	[probably a reference to the *Akṣayamatiparipṛccha* in the *Ratnakūṭa*]
Akṣarāśi-sūtra	ad 3.2	[the Chinese gives equivalent of *Bahudhātuka-sūtra*, in the *Madhyamāgama*]
Kṣāranadī	ad 14.26	[in the *Saṃyuktāgama*]
Guhyakādhipatinirdeśa	ad 12.9	[the *Tathāgatācintyaguhya-nirdeśa* in the *Ratnakūṭa*]
Gocarapariśuddhi-sūtra	ad 5.9	[unlocated]
Daśabhūmika-sūtra	ad 7.4; 14.6; 18.54	[first Chinese trans. c. 297][39]
Pañcaka	ad 18.101	[corresponds to a section of the *Ekottarāgama*]
Pañcasthāna-sūtra	ad 16.18	[corresponds to a section of the *Ekottarāgama*]
Paramārthaśūnyatā	ad 18.101	[unlocated]
Parijñā-sūtra	ad 18.102	[in the *Saṃyuktāgama*]
Prajñāpāramitā	ad 1.12; 5.11; 11.77	[a genre of Mahāyāna sūtra-literature]
Brahmaparipṛcchā-sūtra	ad 11.76; 12.5	[first Chinese trans. in 286]
Bhārahāra-sūtra	ad 18.102	[in the *Saṃyuktāgama*]
Madhyāntavibhāga	ad 18.44	[attributed to Maitreya]
Māṇḍavya-sūtra	ad 20-21.54	[unlocated]
Ratnakūṭa	ad 19.29	[a collection Mahāyāna sūtras]
Śrīmālā-sūtra	ad 11.59	[dated to c. third century CE;[40] later incorporated into the *Ratnakūṭa*]

From this list it can be seen that the MSABh primarily mentions sūtras; the most notable exception to this is the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, a text identified by both Chinese and Tibetan traditions as one of the five treatises of Maitreya. The MSABh specifically mentions

38. These comments identify the cited text's location primarily through reference to the Chinese Buddhist canon. The comments are largely drawn from Lévi 1907 and 1911.

39. See Hirakawa 1990: 280.

40. See Wayman and Wayman 1974: 2.

texts from the *āgamas* and from the *Ratnakūṭa* collection, and it also refers to the *Prajñāpāramitā*; early strata of the *Ratnakūṭa* collection and of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature probably existed by the first century CE (Hirakawa 1990: 251). Two sūtras outside these sources are mentioned which certainly existed by the mid-third century CE (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra* and *Brahmaparipṛcchā-sūtra*), and three unlocated sources are also mentioned. Three points are worth noting: (1) the MSABh refers to a number of sources that are not specifically associated with the Mahāyāna; (2) the MSABh does not refer to any sūtras that are specifically associated with the Yogācāra, such as the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*; and (3) the MSABh generally refers to sources that may be placed at or before the mid-third century CE (I say "generally" principally because little is known about the three unlocated sources).

A number of other Indian Buddhist texts may also be related to the MSA/Bh, either because they directly quote or refer to the MSA, or because they share some significant, specific characteristic with the MSA/Bh and are thus somehow directly associated with the text. I will discuss some specific texts individually, primarily focusing on texts which predate the period of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. My aim here is to attempt to establish a relative chronology between each text considered and the MSA/Bh, in order to gain some perspective on the MSA/Bh's place in the historical development of Indian Buddhist literature. This section will not be of immediate concern to those more interested in the contents and analysis of the MSA/Bh's terms, concepts, and categories.

(1) *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* — this short text was translated into Chinese by Hsüan tsang in 646 (there is also a Tibetan translation, but the Sanskrit text is no longer extant). Keenan's dissertation (1980) is a study and translation of the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa*, a commentary to the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*, and it also contains a discussion of the textual history of the sūtra itself. Keenan (1980: 340) points out that both Sthiramati's and Asvabhāva's subcommentaries to the MSA state that the MSA's source for the teaching of the five dharmas (viz., *dharma-dhātu-viśuddhi* and the four *buddha-jñāna*s) is the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*.[41] However, Keenan (1980: 341) also states that no Yogācāra thinker before Sthiramati and Asvabhāva makes reference to the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*, which suggests that the text is relatively late. Furthermore, the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* indicates at certain points in its comments that the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* is responding to objections, which according to Keenan (1980: 342-353) are probably objections that were raised to specific verses in the MSA's ninth chapter. On the basis of this, Keenan concludes that the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* is later than the MSA and should be dated to about 400 CE. Although Keenan (1987) later reversed his view about the relationship between the MSA and the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*, the only real evidence he offers is the fact that Sthiramati and Asvabhāva state that the sūtra is a source for the MSA; I, however, agree with Makransky (1997: 377, note 11) that Keenan's earlier (and more detailed) arguments are more convincing. Thus I think it is more likely that the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* is borrowing from the MSA, and that the MSA predates the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra*.

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41. This is found in MSAVBh and MSAT ad 9.56-59.

(2) *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* — this text was discussed above. It is available in Chinese and Tibetan, but is no longer extant in Sanskrit. Again, the MSA is the text quoted most often by the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, and it is quoted once by name.[42] From the list of explicitly quoted texts in the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, it may be inferred that the author of the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* considers the MSA to be authoritative.[43] I take Asaṅga to be the author of the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, thus I place the MSA earlier than Asaṅga. Asaṅga's date cannot be fixed with definite certainty, but it may reasonably be hypothesized that he was active sometime during the first half of the fifth century CE.[44] Thus the MSA should be placed before that time, i.e., in the fourth century CE.

(3) *Mahāyānāvatāra* — Ui (1928: 218-219) argues that this text, extant only in Chinese, explicitly quotes the MSA; he dates the Chinese translation to between 427 and 439 CE. Hirakawa et al. (1973: ix), however, argue that since the title of the text quoted in the *Mahāyānāvatāra* (Taishō 1634) is closer to *Maitreyālaṃkāra-sūtra*, and since the explanation of *bodhicitta* quoted by the *Mahāyānāvatāra* does not accord with that of the MSA, the text quoted in the *Mahāyānāvatāra* should not be identified with the MSA.

42. Also, as mentioned above, the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* contains the verses that comprise MSA, Chapter 21.

43. See note 37 above.

44. I take the primary source of evidence for Asaṅga's date to be Paramārtha's *Life of Vasubandhu* (Takakusu 1904, especially: 273-275 and 288), which states that Asaṅga was the elder brother of Vasubandhu, and that the latter had the favor of the Gupta monarch, Vikramāditya (mid-fifth century CE). While others have also used the date of the earliest Chinese translation of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* as evidence for Asaṅga's date, I do not; this will be discussed below. Various dates for Asaṅga have been offered: e.g., Lévi (1911: *1-*2): first half of the fifth century CE; Frauwallner (1956: 326): 315-390 CE [Frauwallner (1951) proposed the theory of two Vasubandhus and argued that Asaṅga was the brother of Vasubandu the elder]; Wayman (1961: 23): 375-430 CE; Hirakawa et al. (1973: ii-iii): 395-470 CE; Davidson (1985: 129): active in the latter half of the fourth century CE. The issue has not been settled.

Davidson (1985: 23-25) also discusses the possible quote at length. He states that Hirakawa's translation of the title of the quoted work is incorrect, and that the title is indeed a translation of *Sūtrālaṃkāra*. Furthermore, Davidson argues that Hirakawa has misunderstood the quote, and that the quote is indeed a paraphrase of MSA 4.2 (on *cittotpāda*). Davidson dates the translation of the *Mahāyānāvatāra* to between 427 and 437 CE, so if his arguments are correct (as I tentatively take them to be), the MSA can be dated to sometime before 437 CE.

(4) *Yogācārabhūmi* — this vast text is divided into five major divisions; the first division, the basic section (sometimes referred to as the *Bahubhūmikavastu*),[45] has seventeen subdivisions called *bhūmi*s; the four other major divisions taken together are roughly equal in length to the first major division alone.[46] Although originally composed in Sanskrit, only some parts of the *Yogācārabhūmi* are still extant in that language; there are, however, complete Chinese and Tibetan translations. The entire *Yogācārabhūmi* is generally attributed to Asaṅga, but Schmithausen (1969a) argues that it represents a scholastic compilation, and Hirakawa et al. (1973: viii) conclude that the text is not likely to have been entirely composed by one author. There are two specific sections of the text that are of interest to us here: the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, mentioned above because of its structural affinity with the MSA; and the *Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī*, because of its explicit reference to the MSA. First I will discuss the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

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45. Schmithausen (1969b: 17, note 4) points out that the title *Bahubhūmikavastu* is not actually used by the text itself: rather the first major division of the text is simply called the *Yogācārabhūmi*.

46. This was brought to my attention by Wayman 1961: 43.

Bodhisattvabhūmi — this text is the fifteenth subdivision of the basic section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. Here I am interested in the structural similarity between the MSA and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. What can be inferred from this structural affinity? Is one text conforming to the structure of the other? Or was each text composed or redacted by the same person, perhaps according to some prior notion of structure? Answers might be found through a consideration of the authorship of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. Although the colophon of the Sanskrit edition of the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* states that the text was composed by Asaṅga,[47] both Hirakawa et al. (1973: vii-ix) and Davidson (1985: 23 and 25) point out that the two earlier Chinese translations of the text (Taishō 1581 and 1582) do not name any author.[48] Furthermore, Schmithausen presents strong arguments for the hypothesis that the *Yogācārabhūmi* represents the work of a number of authors over a period of time.[49] Thus there is no conclusive evidence that Asaṅga was the author of the text. Rather, it seems likely either that Asaṅga was the final redactor of the text or that the text later came to be associated with the Maitreya-Asaṅga complex. Earlier strata of the text, therefore, almost certainly preceded Asaṅga. So it would not be necessary to conclude that the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* postdates the MSA. In fact, because the former text seems to have a less highly developed conception of buddhahood, it is plausible that the

47. For the Sanskrit text, see Dutt 1966: 282.

48. Furthermore, the Chinese canon identifies Maitreya as the composer of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (Taishō 1579, translated by Hsüan tsang), while the Tibetan canon identifies Asaṅga as the composer of all the divisions of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (Derge 4035–4042). Thus the traditions do not uniformly attest to Asaṅga's authorship.

49. In support of Frauwallner (1956: 265), Schmithausen understands the *Yogācārabhūmi* as *ein allmälich gewachsenses Schulwerk* (1969a: 812).

Bodhisattvabhūmi predates the MSA, and that the MSA derives its structure from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī — this second major division of the *Yogācārabhūmi* is a commentary to the seventeen *bhūmi*s of the basic section. Wayman (1961: 30) points out that this part of the *Yogācārabhūmi* contains an explicit reference to the MSA.[50] Schmithausen (1969a: 819, note 45), however, states that this citation is not conclusive evidence of a reference to the MSA on the part of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. He presents the possibility that the reference is a characterization of a particular type of literature (*einer bestimmten Literaturgattung*)—viz., any commentary representing the meaning of the sūtras—rather than a reference to a particular text (*einen bestimmten Text*). However, both Schmithausen and Lévi (1911: 3, note 2.1) point out that at this location the *Yogācārabhūmi* goes on to offer five analogies found at MSA 1.2. Thus, although Schmithausen's suggestion is plausible, I accept the view that the *Viniścayasaṃgrahaṇī* does indeed contain a reference to the MSA. And if the cited location is a reference to the MSA, it can be concluded that the MSA predates at least part of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. This would *not* mean, however, that the MSA predates earlier strata of that text.

(5) *Ratnagotravibhāga* — this text, considered by Tibetan tradition to be one of the five treatises of Maitreya, is extant in Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. The *Ratnagotravibhāga* has two verses in common with the MSA, which seem to be

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50. This is found at DT sems tsam ZHI 198a4-198a7: de la de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs pa'i mdo sde rnams kyi don ji lta ba bzhin du rnam par 'grel pa ni mdo sde'i rgyan zhes bya ste/. Wayman offers the following translation: "In regard to that, the commentary truly representing the meaning of the *sūtras* promulgated by the Tathāgata is called *Sūtrālaṃkāra*" (1961: 30).

quotations from the text, although it does not cite the MSA by name.[51] Johnston (1950: x-xi) argues that the *Ratnagotravibhāga* should not be associated with Asaṅga (whom he takes to be the author of the MSA).[52] He does not, however, necessarily place the *Ratnagotravibhāga* after the MSA because he states that Asaṅga (as the purported author of the MSA) probably took the two shared verses from earlier works. Takasaki (1966: 61-62) argues that the received text of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* postdates Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, but he attributes the original *śloka*s of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to Maitreya (whom he takes to be a historical person), and states that they seem to have been composed before the MSA. While the textual history of the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is certainly a complicated matter, I think it is reasonable to hypothesize that the *Ratnagotravibhāga* does indeed quote the MSA at these two locations since the particle *iti* (equivalent to quotations marks) is found at the end of each of the two verses, and since there is no other probable candidate for the source of the quoted verses.

(6) *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* — this important Yogācāra sūtra, extant only in Chinese and Tibetan, is not quoted or referred to by the MSABh, nor does it quote or refer to the MSA. It may be noted that MSA 20-21.1 uses the phrase *gambhīra-saṃdhi-nirmokṣo* ("making manifest the profound implication"), which is one of the five marks of a bodhisattva according to the commentary; however, there is no reason to believe that

51. For the Sanskrit text, see Johnston 1950: 71, which quotes MSA 9.15 and 9.37. It may be established that the *Ratnagotravibhāga* is quoting a text because it adds the particle *iti* to each verse. Takasaki (1966: 211-212, note 96) argues that the *Ratnagotravibhāga* also quotes the MSA at a third location; he bases this argument on the Chinese version of the text, stating that the Sanskrit text has a lacuna here.

52. Johnston also points out here that the *Ratnagotravibhāga* makes no mention of *vijñapti-mātratā*, *trisvabhāva*, or *ālaya-vijñāna*.

this is a reference to the sūtra. Schmithausen (1976: 240, note 2) argues that MSA 19.44ab presupposes *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* 8.20.2, which is a discussion of the seven types of thusness (*tathatā*).[53] This is an interesting point: the verse-text of the MSA simply introduces the concept of the seven thusnesses, and the commentary does nothing more than list them with no further explanation. It seems as if the seven thusnesses are referred to in the MSA/Bh as a presupposed category. The *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*, on the other hand, explains the seven thusnesses in a way that does not assume any prior explanation. Thus it is possible that the MSA presupposes the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*'s explanation of the seven thusnesses. However, it is curious that the MSABh does not specifically quote or mention the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* at all. Nevertheless, I tentatively accept the hypothesis that the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* is prior to the MSA.

Yogācāra affiliation, date, and context

From all that has been said above regarding the MSA's relation to other texts, it would not be too difficult to establish the MSA's place of importance in the development of Yogācāra thought.[54] In the previous chapter, I suggested five criteria for the identification of a philosophical school. If we interpret these criteria not as fixed rules for defining a philosophical school, but as heuristic devices directed towards contextualizing

53. For the Tibetan text of the sūtra, see Lamotte 1935: 99-100; for a French trans., ibid., 219; for an English trans. with the Tibetan text on the facing page, see Powers 1995: 170-173.

54. One of the best general historical introductions to the Yogācāra may be found in Davidson 1985: 14-67. It may be interesting to note Davidson's claim (ibid., 52) that the MSA and the *Madhyāntavibhāga* serve as the source of Yogācāra doctrines for the *Madhyamakahṛdaya* of Bhāvaviveka (c. 500-570 CE).

forms of discourse, we may see that the MSA/Bh may reasonably be placed in the wider context of Yogācāra thought. For example, (1) in terms of theses, the MSA/Bh interprets conventional reality in accordance with the doctrine of *citta-mātra*; (2) in terms of specific terminology, the MSA/Bh employs such characteristic Yogācāra terms as *ālaya-vijñāna*, *āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti*, *trisvabhāva*, and *vijñapti-mātra*; (3) in terms of philosophical concerns, the MSA/Bh exhibits a strong concern with the nature and functioning of consciousness; (4) in terms of associations with certain individuals, the MSA/Bh has been traditionally associated with the Maitreya-Asaṅga complex; and (5) in terms of internal Buddhist traditions, the MSA/Bh has been directly associated with the Yogācāra by both Chinese and Tibetan traditions. Thus there are good reasons for taking the MSA/Bh to be a Yogācāra text.

The *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* has certainly been the most important and influential sūtra for the Yogācāra, and the *Yogācārabhūmi* is the largest Yogācāra śāstra, containing (in parts at least) some of the oldest extant Yogācāra material. If these two works are taken as representative of the first phase of distinctly Yogācāra thought, then the second phase might be characterized by treatises that more systematically (that is to say, in their entirety) present a Yogācāra point of view; and among the extant Yogācāra treatises of this second phase, the MSA is certainly one of the earliest (along with the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*). Regarding the date of the MSA, it should be placed after the third century CE, because of the commentary's references to texts from that period, but before the fifth century CE, due to its importance to the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*. Thus I place the MSA in the fourth century CE, perhaps around 350. And since I take the MSA and the MSABh

together as the work of one final redactor/author, I also place the commentary in the fourth century.

Regarding the context in which the text was composed, I am disinclined to offer a hypothesis due to a lack of direct evidence. If I were to venture a guess (and it is little more than that), I would say that it may be possible that the text was composed in the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, in a monastic environment. This guess is based only on associations with the text derived from the accounts offered by Hsüan tsang and Tāranātha.[55] Regarding the use to which the text was put, I know of no direct evidence concerning its use in India, although I would presume to say that it may have been used in a monastic context, perhaps as a text for monastic study.[56] In this connection, Willis (1979: 48, note 6) points out that the MSA was one of the six basic texts of the Bka' gdams pa sect founded by Atīśa (982-1054 CE). Regarding the pedagogical context in which the text was studied, some reasonable hypotheses may be inferred from the formal features of the text itself. The MSABh, in commenting on the MSA, generally comments on an individual verse or on a small group of two to five verses (in a very few cases it comments on a half-verse or on a larger group of verses). The commentary does not comment on every word in the verse-text, and generally focuses on the meaning of the verses rather than their grammar or word-forms. Given the form of the text, it is

55. Hsüan tsang places Asaṅga in Ayodhyā during his reception of the text from Maitreya (Beal 1906, vol. 1: 226); Tāranātha places him in Magadha when he put the five treatises of Maitreya into written form (Chimpa and Chattopadhyaya 1990: 160). Since I doubt Asaṅga's authorship, I view these accounts primarily as sources for traditional contextual and geographical associations.

56. General introductions to Buddhist monasticism and education in India may be found in S. Dutt 1962, especially: 169-232; and Joshi 1967, especially: 83-114 and 154-178.

reasonable to hypothesize that the verse-text (or sections of it) may have been memorized by ideal readers before they would have learned (listened to) the commentary.[57] Thus the commentary would have been used as an aid to meaning of the verses.

On the title and purpose of the text

Here I would like to discuss the title and purpose of the text from the point of view of the MSA/Bh itself. The first three verses of the text address these concerns. The opening verse (MSA 1.1) states:

> artha-jño 'rtha-vibhāvanāṃ prakurute vācā padaiś cāmalair
> duḥkhasyottaraṇāya duḥkhita-jane kāruṇyatas tan-mayaḥ/
> dharmasyottama-yāna-deśita-vidheḥ sattveṣu tad-gāmiṣu
> śliṣṭām artha-gatiṃ niruttara-gatāṃ pañcātmikāṃ darśayan//

> The one who knows the meaning (aim, purpose; *artha*)[58] manifests the meaning with pure speech and words in order to overcome suffering, because he is compassionate and absorbed in [compassion] for those who suffer. To the sentient beings who go by that [path], he shows the unsurpassed fivefold meaning that adheres to the method taught in the foremost vehicle of the dharma.

In this verse the text states that the one who knows the *artha* (meaning, aim, purpose) manifests that meaning in accordance with the method of the foremost vehicle (a reference to the Mahāyāna). Here the commentary states that the one who adorns or ornaments (*alaṃkaroti*) the teaching is the one who knows the meaning (*artha-jña*), and his ornamenting consists in manifesting the meaning (*artha-vibhāvanāṃ kurute*).

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57. A useful discussion of the formal features and ideal readers of commentarial literature may be found in Griffiths 1999: 94-97 and 114-124.

58. The term *artha* has a broad semantic range in Sanskrit, and covers such words as "aim," "purpose," "cause," "meaning," and "object." I have chosen to translate it as "meaning" because that word

According to the MSA's own account of its purpose, the text is directed towards ornamenting the fivefold meaning of the Mahāyāna through manifesting its meanings. Through a series of five analogies, the next verse (MSA 1.2) and its commentary go on to specify the fivefold meaning as the meaning that is established (*sādhya*), developed (*vyutpādya*), reflected upon (*cintya*), surpassing reflection (*acintya*), and perfected (*pariniṣpanna*). The commentary (MSABh ad 1.2) then states:

> so 'nena sūtrālaṃkāreṇa vivṛtaḥ prītim agryāṃ dadhāti/
>
> The explanations given by the ornament to the sūtras (*sūtrālaṃkāra*) bestow the highest joy.

This comment is further developed in the following verse, MSA 1.3:

> yathā bimbaṃ bhūṣā-prakṛti-guṇavad darpaṇa-gataṃ
> viśiṣṭaṃ prāmodyaṃ janayati nṛṇāṃ darśana-vaśāt/
> tathā dharmaḥ sūkta-prakṛti-guṇa-yukto 'pi satataṃ
> vibhaktārthas tuṣṭiṃ janayati viśiṣṭām iha satāṃ//
>
> Just as an image that has the natural quality of being ornamental, when reflected in a mirror, produces the highest joy in people due to its appearance, so too does the dharma that has the natural quality of being well-spoken, when its meaning is ornamented (analyzed; *vibhakta*),[59] always produce the highest contentment among the wise.

Here it may be noted that the text draws an analogy between reflecting an image in a mirror and ornamenting the meaning of the dharma; the sense here is that in ornamenting the meaning of the dharma, nothing is thereby added to it—rather the ornamenting consists in reflecting back the meaning that is already present. The text states that

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encompasses both the sense of "that which is intended, aim, purpose" as well as "that which is signified, sense."

59. The term *vibhakta* means both "ornamented" and "analyzed," thus it allows for a particularly appropriate resonance that does not occur in English.

although the dharma itself has the quality of being well-spoken, when its meaning is adorned or ornamented, this produces contentment for the wise. This verse, then, may be understood along with the comment to 1.2 translated above: the *Sūtrālaṃkāra*—the "ornament to the sūtras"—produces joy and contentment through ornamenting (analyzing) the meaning of the sūtras with its explanations.[60] This is the account the text gives of its own purpose and title.

On the nature of the text

Finally I would like to consider the nature of the MSA/Bh from the point of view of its contents. It may be noted from the list of contents offered above that the MSA/Bh primarily contains discussions of terms and concepts relevant to the practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It should be noted that although the chapters tend to focus on Buddhist practice, they are not specifically discussions of *how* those practices are to be carried out, nor are they even discussions of *what* specifically comprises those practices. Rather, the chapters are first and foremost discussions of terms and concepts that are central to its conceptualization of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice. For example, in affirming the perfections (*pāramitā*, the topic of MSA, Chapter 16) as an important element of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice, the text does not ask how one should practice the perfections, or what specifically qualifies as the perfection of giving (*dāna*), etc. Rather the text asks—and develops responses to—questions such as: what is the nature of the

60. In connection with this, it may be noted that according to Bu ston, the MSA belongs to the category of treatises of "arranging in a regular system that which in Scripture is in disorder" (Obermiller 1987: 43).

perfections? Why are there six perfections? Why are the perfections to be taken up in the particular order in which they are given? The same situation may be seen in the case of the aids to awakening (*bodhipakṣa*, Chapter 18): the text does not explain how the aids to awakening are to be cultivated, but rather presupposes such information. Rather the text concerns itself with analyzing and sometimes providing interpretive etymologies for them, and with identifying them with different stages of practice and conceptually relating them to other forms of practice. The same situation is also found in the text's treatment of taking refuge (*śaraṇa-gamana*, Chapter 2), spiritual lineage (*gotra*, Chapter 3), the production of the thought of awakening (*cittotpāda*, Chapter 4), and every subsequent chapter. The conceptual orientation of the text is even more clearly evident in the chapters on awakening (*bodhi*, Chapter 9) and on the investigation of the dharma (*dharma-paryeṣṭi*, Chapter 11), which are among the longest chapters in the text. Thus it is my contention that the text's contents indicate the MSA/Bh to be primarily concerned with reflections on terms and concepts that play an important role in particular Mahāyāna conceptualizations of the Buddhist path. Put in other terms, the MSA/Bh is more a reflection on concepts and issues that are central to Mahāyāna Buddhism than an instruction manual for the attainment of specific Buddhist soteriological goals.

All of this is not to say, however, that the MSA/Bh is an entirely systematic text. While it does, on the whole, present perspectives that may be characterized as Yogācāra, there are certain points at which the ontological discourse, for example, seems to present the perspective of a more realist, abhidharma ontology. Furthermore, while the MSA/Bh does give rather detailed presentations of terms and concepts such as *trisvabhāva*,

āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti, and *buddha-jñāna* it does not express particular concern with showing how these terms and concepts are logically interrelated or with systematically working out their implications.

Again, I contend that the MSA/Bh primarily contains reflections on terms and concepts that are central to its conceptualization of Mahāyāna Buddhist practice. And given that the text is concerned with the conceptualization of Buddhist practice, it follows that the text would also be concerned with the conceptualization of the primary distinction in forms of Buddhist practice: the distinction between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna. In fact, as may be noted from the table of contents offered above, the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna—and the establishment of the Mahāyāna as the premier Buddhist soteriological vehicle—is one of the central concerns of the text. The first chapter of the text is titled "the establishment of the Mahāyāna" (*mahāyāna-siddhi*), and it is an extended apology for the Mahāyāna. It may also be noted from the list of contents that subsequent chapters often conclude with a verse on the "greatness" (*māhātmya*) of some form of Mahāyāna practice—on why that vehicle is superior to the "Hīnayāna." Thus the conceptualization of the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna is of central importance to the MSA/Bh. And while this distinction is by no means the only concern of the text, it does allow for a useful entry point into the text's many concerns.

Part II
Soteriological Terms

Chapter 3
Gotra (spiritual lineage)

Introduction

The term *gotra* has been variously translated as "family, class, category" (Edgerton 1970, vol. 2: 216), "species" (Wayman 1961: 58), or "spiritual lineage" (Griffiths 1990b: 49).[1] If sentient beings are understood as continua of non-substantial momentary events, gotra represents the category to which a particular continuum belongs. But here category is in reference to soteriology: gotra is primarily a soteriological category. That is to say, the category of gotra to which a sentient being belongs is taken to be indicative of that being's soteriological possibilities; i.e., what type of—or even whether—awakening and nirvāṇa can be attained. Thus when a particular sentient being belongs to the parinirvāṇa-gotra, that being is said to have the potentiality for achieving parinirvāṇa. And if a particular being is classified as "without gotra" (*agotraka*), this is taken to indicate that, at least for the present, that being has no potentiality for achieving any Buddhist soteriological goal.

Perhaps the first issue that should be addressed is the relation between the concept of gotra and the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, since that distinction is the focus of this study. That there is indeed a relation between the two is clear from a number of places in the text, the most notable of which, perhaps, may be found in the commentary to 3.2:

asti yāna-traye gotra-bhedaḥ/

1. The translation "spiritual lineage" is perhaps the most appropriate in the context of the MSA/Bh. "Spiritual lineage," however, should not be confused with the notion of a lineage of transmission or tradition. In this dissertation I will leave the term *gotra* untranslated and unitalicized.

There is a difference in gotra with respect to the three vehicles.

Other places in the text also make it clear that there is an important relationship between one's gotra and the soteriological vehicle that one takes up. This will be discussed below.

As I stated above, for the MSA/Bh, gotra is indicative of a sentient being's soteriological possibilities (which are themselves closely related to soteriological vehicles). Gotra has also, however, been understood in a stronger sense: according to one line of interpretation, gotra not only indicates a sentient being's soteriological possibilities, it also determines them.[2] In this chapter I will focus on the question of in precisely what sense and to precisely what extent gotra determines soteriological possibilities for the MSA/Bh. I will do this by attempting to decide whether gotra is interpreted as a predetermined category to which sentient beings belong, or whether it is interpreted as a potentiality that all sentient beings may acquire.[3] In order to do this, however, it will first be necessary to arrive at a more complete interpretation of the concept of gotra as it appears in the MSA/Bh. Therefore, I will discuss the meaning of the term in the text, its relation to other important terms and concepts, and its subdivision into different types. After that I will turn to the analysis of the MSA/Bh's understanding of the role of gotra in determining soteriological possibilities.

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2. The position that gotra is determinative of a sentient being's soteriological possibilities appears in the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa*: "From the beginningless beginning all sentient beings are divided into five kinds of lineages (*gotra*). . . . the first four of the above will ultimately attain final cessation . . . But the fifth lineage . . . will never reach a time of final cessation" (Keenan 1980: 494). For other references to gotra as a determined and determining category in Buddhist literature, see Lamotte 1976: 304.

3. It may be noted that in my general formulation of this issue, I have benefited from Ruegg's work on gotra, especially 1969: 73-107.

Exegesis of *gotra*

As I stated above, a number of translations have been offered for the term gotra. The MSA/Bh itself offers an interesting interpretation of the term. In explaining the use of the phrase *guṇottāraṇatā* (having the characteristic of increasing virtues) in 3.4, the commentary states:

> guṇottāraṇārthena gotraṃ veditavyaṃ guṇā uttaranty asmād udbhavantīti kṛtvā/
>
> Gotra should be known as that which increases virtues, since virtues arise and increase because of it.

From this we may see that for the MSA/Bh, acquiring a gotra means acquiring the ability to increase virtues. This ability is of no small importance in Buddhism because the development of a number of virtues is necessary for the attainment of specific soteriological goals.

The text also specifically links gotra to the roots of good (*kuśala-mūla*).[4] Obtaining the roots of good is a necessary aspect of the path to awakening and nirvāṇa, and the soteriological significance of gotra can be seen in that the MSA/Bh posits a close link between gotra and the roots of good. In 3.3 the verse-text states that the pre-eminence of gotra is indicated by the vastness, totality, greatness of purpose, and imperishability of its purity (*śubha*)—and here the commentary identifies purity with the

4. The MSA/Bh is not the only text that links these two. For a discussion of the relation between gotra and the roots of good in the context of the *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra* and the *Abhidharmakośa*, see Davidson 1985: 92-105. The *kuśala-mūla*s also play an important role in many Buddhist conceptions of the path; see Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "The path to perdition: the wholesome roots and their eradication," in Buswell and Gimello 1992: 107-134; Buswell identifies one basic classification of the *kuśala-mūla* as nongreed (*alobha*), nonhatred (*adveśa*), and nonignorance (*amoha*) (ibid., 109).

roots of good. And in 3.9 when the verse-text compares gotra to a mine of gold,[5] the commentary states that gotra is like a source of abundant gold since it is the basis of unlimited roots of good.

The connection between gotra and soteriology may further be seen in that gotra is related to other soteriological concepts. In the MSA/Bh gotra is posited as the cause of differences in inclination towards a particular vehicle (*adhimukti*)—that is to say, which soteriological vehicle one will be inclined to follow; religious practice (*pratipatti*); and awakening itself (*bodhi*) (MSA 3.2). It is said to be the basis of knowledge or awareness (*jñāna*), purification from the afflictions (*kleśa-nairmalya*), and the supernormal powers, such as the higher knowledges (*abhijñā*) (MSABh ad 3.9). It is said to be the cause of great awakening, great knowledge, concentration (*samādhi*), and the maturation of sentient beings (MSA 3.10). Gotra is also identified as one cause for the production of the thought of awakening (*cittotpāda*) (MSABh ad 4.7), compassion (ad 17.34), the practice of the perfections (ad 16.16), and the specific perfection of patience (ad 8.6). Indeed at MSA 19.61 gotra is identified as the first of the ten aspects of the Mahāyāna, thus it is the foundation upon which the practice of the Mahāyāna is based. According to the MSA/Bh, then, having a gotra is foundational to attaining any specific Buddhist soteriological goal.

Another important approach to understanding the concept of gotra in the MSA/Bh is identifying other terms used as equivalent to it. One such equivalent term used by the text is *dhātu*. In fact, there are two places in the text in which gotra and *dhātu* are used

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5. In addition to the definitions offered above, gotra also means "mine."

interchangeably.[6] The first is at 11.8, where the verse-text uses the term *tridhātuka*. Here the commentary states:

> tatra dhātu-niyato yaḥ śrāvakādi-gotra-niyataḥ/
>
> There [in the previous line of the commentary] a definite *dhātu* means a definite gotra, such as śrāvaka, etc.

Although the term *dhātu* has a number of meanings in this and other texts, in this instance, "stage" or "level of attainment" seems to be the most appropriate.

In another context, at 11.43, the verse-text uses the term *ārya-gotra*, the "noble gotra," which the commentary glosses with *anāsrava-dhātu*, the "undefiled realm"—i.e., the realm or level of attainment without the influx of afflictions which bind one to saṃsāra. In the following verse, the commentary equates the undefiled realm with liberation (*vimukti*)—a term I will discuss in the next chapter. From 11.43, then, we may infer that gotra is equated with something like "spiritual stage or level of attainment."[7]

The term gotra is also used twice in the commentary as a gloss for *prakṛti*, or "nature." The commentary to 8.5 glosses *svaprakṛtyā*—"by one's nature" or "according to one's nature"—with *gotreṇa*—an instrumental form of the term meaning "by gotra" or "according to gotra." Also, the commentary to 18.19-21 glosses the term *prakṛtyā* with *gotrataḥ*, an ablative form of the term meaning "due to one's gotra." So here gotra refers to one's nature. It is significant to note that at both of these places in the text, gotra is specified as a cause of developing some aspect of the path to awakening; in 8.5 it is

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6. Furthermore, Ruegg (1969: 85) points out that in a number of places the Tibetan text of the MSA/Bh has *rigs* (normally *gotra*) for *khams* (normally *dhātu*).

7. In this connection it may be interesting to note that according to Ruegg (1974: 204), the *Visuddhimagga* equates *ariya-gotta* with *ariya-bhūmi*, which Ruegg translates as "spiritual stage of the saint."

identified as a cause of the maturation of compassion, and in 18.19-21 it is identified as a cause of firmness. Again we see the connection between gotra and soteriology.

While gotra has been equated with spiritual stage or level of attainment (*dhātu*) and nature (*prakṛti*),[8] it is so far unclear whether this stage or nature represents something predetermined or something acquired. That is to say, if the development of certain capacities or virtues is due to one's nature—or due to one's gotra—then does gotra represent a predetermined and predetermining category, or does it represent an alterable category of spiritual potentiality? This is the question that I will return to in my analysis of the concept gotra. In either case, however, belonging to a certain gotra means having the potentiality for reaching certain soteriological goals. The next step in understanding gotra, then, is understanding the different categories, or subdivisions, of gotra.

In Indian Buddhist literature, a list of the following five gotras may be found: śrāvaka-gotra, pratyekabuddha-gotra, bodhisattva-gotra, indefinite-gotra (*aniyata-gotra*), and without-gotra (*agotra*).[9] Sometimes this list of five is shortened to just the first three members,[10] which the MSA/Bh then aligns with the three vehicles: those of the śrāvaka-

8. These synonyms for gotra are also found in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Sanskrit edition, Dutt 1966: 2); a third synonym given in that text is *bīja*, "seed."

9. For example, the *Mahāvyutpatti* contains the following fivefold list of gotras (1261-1265): *śrāvaka-yānābhisamaya-gotraḥ, pratyekabuddha-yānābhisamaya-gotraḥ, tathāgata-yānābhisamaya-gotraḥ* (gotra for the realization of the vehicle of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and tathāgatas, respectively), *aniyata-gotraḥ* (indefinite gotra), *agotrakaḥ* (without gotra); see Sakaki 1926. The *Mahāvyutpatti* is a compilation of lists of Sanskrit Buddhist terms, along with their Tibetan translations, that dates to the early ninth century CE, centuries after the time of the MSA/Bh. Nevertheless, when a particular list is found in the *Mahāvyutpatti*, this suggests that the list was important to Indian Buddhist thought at the time. The fivefold list of gotras is also significant for our purposes since Sthiramati offers the same one in the MSAVBh (DT sems tsam MI 48a3-4).

10. The three gotras are referred to in the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*; Lamotte 1935: 73-74 and 198-199 offers the Tibetan text and French translation, respectively; cf. Powers 1995: 110-115. The *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* ad 6.23cd also identifies the three gotras (Sanskrit edition, Pradhan 1967: 348). It should be

gotra go by the śrāvakayāna, etc. But such a shortening of the list need not reflect any serious philosophical differences. Only the first three gotras result in particular Buddhist soteriological goals, since only the first three gotras correspond to particular Buddhist soteriological paths. Furthermore, being classified under the category of indefinite-gotra may be understood as a liminal state: when one's gotra becomes definite, it will be in terms of one of the three standard gotras of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva. And the category "without-gotra," after all, is not properly an element of the list of types of gotra. Therefore, the lists of five and three gotras may be seen as having different conceptual emphases, rather than different theoretical bases.

While the MSA/Bh offers no specific list of gotras that corresponds to those given above, each member of the list of five is either explicitly mentioned or implicitly referred to.[11] It is important to note, however, that while the verse-text does state that there are some with an indefinite gotra (3.6) and that there are some without a gotra (1.14), it is only in the commentary that we find specific mention of particular gotras, e.g., the śrāvaka-gotra or the bodhisattva-gotra.[12] For instance, the śrāvaka-gotra is mentioned in the commentary to 11.53 and 11.54; and as I mentioned above, the commentary to 11.8 uses the term *śrāvakādi-gotra*, "the gotra of śrāvakas, etc." [i.e., pratyekabuddhas and

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noted that other lists of gotras appear in Indian Buddhist literature. For example, the *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra* mentions six different gotras; but even in this case the principal gotras of the Vaibhāṣikas are the standard three identified here; see Davidson 1985: 94-95.

11. While the pratyekabuddha-gotra is implicitly referred to, the others are explicitly mentioned. Again, the MSA/Bh does offer a specific list; see note 9.

12. The verse-text uses terms such as "foremost-gotra" (MSA 3.13: *agra-gotra*) or "noble-gotra" (MSA 11.43: *ārya-gotra*) to refer to the *bodhisattva-gotra*.

bodhisattvas], thus the pratyekabuddha-gotra is implicitly referred to in the commentary. The bodhisattva-gotra is mentioned in the commentary to a number of verses in the text.[13]

The superiority of the bodhisattva-gotra is clearly established in the MSA/Bh. In the verse which links gotra to the roots of good (3.3), the commentary states that the roots of good of the bodhisattva-gotra are far superior to those of the śrāvaka-gotra—the roots of good of the śrāvaka-gotra, for example, lack the special powers of a buddha. And in 11.43 the commentary states that the noble gotra of buddhas—i.e., the bodhisattva-gotra—is distinct from the gotras of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas for five reasons: (1) it is purified from the impregnating afflictions (*savāsana-kleśa*), (2) it purifies a buddha-field, and (3-5) it attains the three buddha-bodies.

Here I should mention that the buddha-gotra is mentioned again in the commentary to 9.77, in the context of a discussion about whether buddhahood is one or many. It is stated that buddhahood cannot be one (i.e., a unity) because there are infinitely many sentient beings that belong to the buddha-gotra. Although the buddha-gotra may at first appear to be a fourth particular gotra alongside those of the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva, actually it is quite clear that the buddha-gotra is another term for the bodhisattva-gotra. At 3.2 the commentary states there are three forms of awakening, and that each form corresponds to a gotra as a fruit corresponds to its seed: thus the awakening of a buddha corresponds to the bodhisattva-gotra. Then at 3.4 the commentary states that gotra does not exist along with its fruit; so when the awakening of

13. E.g., MSABh ad 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.12, 3.13, and 11.54.

a buddha is attained, neither the bodhisattva-gotra nor any other gotra continues to exist. Therefore, there is no buddha-gotra distinct from the bodhisattva-gotra.

Again while no specific list of gotras may be found in the text, there is other indirect evidence which suggests that there are only the three particular gotras of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva. As mentioned above, the commentary to 3.2 states that there is a difference in gotra with respect to the three vehicles—the three vehicles here ostensibly being the śrāvakayāna, the pratyekabuddhayāna, and the bodhisattvayāna.[14] The commentary also goes on to distinguish three types of fruit, or awakening (inferior, middling, or superior), stating that each one corresponds to a particular gotra. Then at 5.4-5 the commentary states that there are three gotras: again, inferior, middling, or superior. Considering this in conjunction with the specific mention of the śrāvaka-gotra and the bodhisattva-gotra, makes it clear that the MSA/Bh posits the following threefold structure:

spiritual category	soteriological vehicle	form of awakening
śrāvaka-gotra	śrāvakayāna	inferior
pratyekabuddha-gotra	pratyekabuddhayāna	middling
bodhisattva-gotra	bodhisattvayāna	superior

This picture is complicated, however, by the classification of indefinite-gotra. In 3.6 the verse-text introduces a fourfold classification of gotras:

> niyatāniyataṃ gotram ahāryaṃ hāryam eva ca/
> pratyayair gotra-bhedo 'yaṃ samāsena catur-vidhaḥ//

> Gotra can be definite or indefinite, incapable of being lost or able to be lost. In sum, according to conditions, the distinctions of gotra are fourfold.

14. While the first two vehicles are specifically mentioned (see, e.g., MSABh ad 19.44), the third is not; the term *mahāyāna* is used rather than *bodhisattvayāna*.

While the verse seems to set up a fourfold classification system (definite-incapable of being lost, definite-able to be lost, etc.), the commentary reduces this to a twofold system: "definite" corresponding only to "incapable of being lost," and "indefinite" corresponding only to "able to be lost."[15] While it is not immediately apparent whether the fourfold system should properly be reduced to a twofold system, two points indicate that the commentary is justified in restricting gotras to two types. First, while the term "indefinite" (*aniyata*) is again used by the text in connection with gotra (at MSA/Bh 11.54), neither term of the pair "incapable of being lost/able to be lost" (*ahārya/hārya*) is again linked to gotra. Furthermore, Sthiramati's subcommentary agrees with the MSABh in specifying that "definite" corresponds to "incapable of being lost" and "indefinite" corresponds to "able to be lost."[16]

The important thing to note with regard to the classification definite/indefinite is that for the MSA/Bh, indefinite-gotra does not represent a fourth particular gotra alongside the gotras of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva. Rather, any sentient being who is categorized under one of the three particular gotras may be further classified according to whether that particular gotra is definite or indefinite. If the gotra is definite that means that it is fixed and will not be lost, but if the gotra is indefinite that means that it is not fixed and that there is the possibility that the gotra can be lost or changed after it has been acquired.

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15. MSABh ad 3.6: samāsena caturvidhaṃ gotraṃ niyatāniyataṃ tad eva yathā-kramaṃ pratyayair ahāryaṃ hāryaṃ ceti/.

16. MSAVBh ad 3.6 (DT sems tsam MI 45b4-5): de bas na rigs nges pa rnams ni rkyen gyis mi 'phrogs pa zhes bya ste/ . . . rigs ma nges pa rnams ni rkyen gyis 'phrog pa zhes bya ste/.

The commentary specifies that particular gotras may be definite or indefinite. In the section of the text that discusses the *ekayāna* (a section I will return to in detail in Chapter 10) the verse-text (11.54) states:

> ākarṣaṇārtham ekeṣām anya-saṃdhāraṇāya ca/
> deśitāniyatānāṃ hi saṃbuddhair ekayānatā//
>
> For the purpose of attracting some, and for the purpose of supporting others, the buddhas taught the fact of one vehicle to those who are indefinite.

The commentary goes on to specify that those who are attracted are those with an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra and those who are supported are those with an indefinite bodhisattva-gotra. Also, in discussing the function of buddhahood as a refuge, the commentary to 9.8 states:

> hīnayāna-paritrāṇatvam aniyata-gotrāṇāṃ mahāyānaikāyanī-karaṇāt/
>
> [Buddhahood] protects those of an indefinite gotra from the Hīnayāna by constructing the uniform path of the Mahāyāna.

Although this comment refers to the indefinite-gotra without linking it to one of the three specific gotras, it seems reasonable to read it in terms of verse 11.54: buddhas teach the unity of vehicles in order to lure those of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra away from the Hīnayāna, and in order to keep those of an indefinite bodhisattva-gotra from entering the Hīnayāna. In discussing the ten types of sentient beings towards whom bodhisattvas are compassionate (MSA/Bh 17.29-30), the verse-text refers to one type as those who have gone astray, which the commentary specifies as those who are indefinite in adhering to the Hīnayāna[17]—a reference to the indefinite śrāvaka- and pratyekabuddha-gotras. While

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17. MSABh ad 17.29-30: utpatha-prasthitā hīnayāna-prayuktā aniyatāḥ/. As we will see in Chapter 9, by *hīnayāna* the MSA/Bh means the *śrāvakayāna* and the *pratyekabuddhayāna*.

the indefinite pratyekabuddha-gotra is not specifically mentioned in the MSA/Bh it is mentioned in Sthiramati's subcommentary. In fact, Sthiramati specifies that each of the three standard gotras may be definite or indefinite.[18]

In the commentary to verse 11.53 the MSABh mentions the indefinite śrāvaka-gotra, stating that those of this gotra may attain final liberation through the Mahāyāna.[19] Thus there is the possibility for one of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra to attain the bodhisattva-gotra. Furthermore, if as 11.54 states some bodhisattvas are in need of support, this implies that one of an indefinite bodhisattva-gotra has the possibility of losing that gotra. From this we can see that for those of an indefinite gotra there is the possibility of transferring from one gotra to another and the possibility of losing one's gotra.[20]

The final classification to consider is that of being without gotra. As I stated above, this category is specifically mentioned in the verse-text at 1.14 and it is the focus of 3.11, although there it is not specifically mentioned in the verse. With regard to the topic of being without gotra, 3.11 states:

> aikāntiko duścarite 'sti kaścit kaścit samudghātita-śukla-dharmā/
> amokṣa-bhāgīya-śubho 'sti kaścin nihīna-śuklo 'sty api hetu-hīnaḥ//[21]

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18. See MSAVBh ad 3.6 (DT sems tsam MI 45a6-7).

19. MSABh ad 11.53: aniyata-śrāvaka-gotrāṇāṃ mahāyānena niryāṇād yānti tena yānam iti kṛtvā/.

20. For a discussion of this issue in the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa*, see Keenan 1980: 678-684; briefly, those of an indefinite gotra may attain nirvāṇa either through the Mahāyāna or through one of the other vehicles.

21. Following the commentary, I do not interpret this verse in terms of the standard four *padas*; I read the last *pada* as identifying two elements in a list, rather than one.

> Some have nothing but ill conduct, some have pure qualities that have been destroyed, some have purity that is not associated with liberation, or an inferior purity, and some also lack the cause.

The commentary to this verse explains that being without gotra means lacking the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa; thus those who do not have a gotra are unable to achieve parinirvāṇa.[22] The commentary explains that there are two ways in which one may lack the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa: lacking them at the present time (*tat-kāla*) and lacking them absolutely or indefinitely (*atyantam*). The first option is rather clear and makes reference to the reasons stated in the verse: having ill conduct, having cut-off roots of good (*samucchinna-kuśala-mūla*), having roots of good unrelated to liberation (*amokṣa-bhāgīya-kuśala-mūla*), and having inferior roots of good (*hīna-kuśala-mūla*). But the second option—lacking the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa absolutely or indefinitely—is a bit more ambiguous. This ambiguity is the result of the term *atyantam*, a term which has a semantic range which includes both "absolutely" and "indefinitely."[23] Philosophically, however, there is quite a difference between translating the term one way or the other. If certain sentient beings "absolutely" lack the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa, then they absolutely lack a gotra: it is, as it were, as if they were predetermined never to attain a gotra. But if, on the other hand, certain sentient beings "indefinitely" lack the qualities associated with parinirvāṇa, then they need not be

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22. The term *aparinirvāṇa-dharmāṇaḥ* is used at MSABh ad 17.29-30: it refers to those do not have the qualities of parinirvāṇa because they have never put an end to saṃsāra (*saṃsāra-vartmātyantānupacchedāt*).

23. Ruegg (1969: 80ff.) translates the term as *absolument* and Lévi (1911: 30) translates it as *indéfiniment*. Both definitions seem possible. The term *atyantam* is formed from the prefix *ati-* (beyond, surpassing) and the word *anta* (end, limit, boundary). To say that something is "beyond or surpassing an end or limit" may mean either that it has no end or limit (i.e., it is absolute) or that its limit is undefined (i.e., it is indefinite).

absolutely restricted from acquiring a gotra; there is still the possibility that they might acquire roots of good in some indefinite future.

Before arriving at some sort of determination of this issue, I would first like to consider a further type of classification of gotra that appears in the MSA/Bh. The verse-text at 3.4 states:

> prakṛtyā paripuṣṭaṃ ca āśrayaś cāśritaṃ ca tat/
> sad asac caiva vijñeyaṃ guṇottāraṇatārthataḥ//

> By nature, attained, support and supported, existing and not existing, it should truly be known as that which increases virtues.

Here the commentary specifies that gotra is natural insofar as it has the nature of a support, and it is attained insofar as it has the nature of being supported; and that it exists along with its cause, but it does not exist along with its fruit. From this we can see that gotra is something that can be attained and that it is something which itself has a cause. In order to find the cause of gotra we must refer again to 3.11, where it was stated that some lack gotra because they are deficient in roots of good. Thus the roots of good are to be understood as the cause of gotra. But here we must also remember that gotra itself serves as a basis for further roots of good (as in 3.9 above). Thus while gotra is attained through acquiring roots of good, when it is attained it serves as a basis for unlimited roots of good.

So from all that has been said above, we can see that: (1) having a gotra is a prerequisite for attaining Buddhist soteriological goals; (2) there are three specific gotras recognized by the text; (3) there are some who do not have any gotra; and (4) gotra can be acquired through amassing roots of good. The question that remains, then, is: can a

gotra be acquired by anyone, or are there some sentient beings that are absolutely without a gotra, beings that are in some sense predetermined never to acquire a gotra?

Comments on the *gotra*-theory

My aim here, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, will be to determine to what extent the MSA/Bh views gotra as representing a fixed and predetermined category or to what extent it views gotra as representing a potentiality that all sentient beings may acquire. Although it would seem from what has been said at 3.4 that the MSA/Bh posits that gotra can be attained, this statement is in tension with 3.11, which posits that there are two categories of beings without gotra: those with deficient roots of good, and those who lack the cause. And as the commentary specifies, those who lack the cause are said to lack gotra (perhaps) "absolutely." Thus it may be the case that, according to the MSA/Bh, gotra can only be acquired by that category of beings who are deficient in roots of good, but not by that category of beings who are "absolutely" without gotra.

In considering this issue, it is important to first turn to another related issue, that of the *tathāgatagarbha*, the "embryo of the Tathāgata." The MSA (verse-text) contains one mention of the *tathāgatagarbha*, which is found at 9.37:[24]

> sarveṣām aviśiṣṭāpi tathatā śuddhim āgatā/
> tathāgatatvaṃ tasmāc ca tad-garbhāḥ sarva-dehinaḥ//
>
> Although thusness is in all [living beings] without distinction, when it is pure it is the nature of the Tathāgata; thus all living beings have its embryo.

24. Ruegg (1969: 82) also refers to this verse in connection with 3.11, stating that the two seem to be in at least apparent contradiction, and that this apparent contradiction has divided Tibetan commentators.

This verse states that all sentient beings have the embryo of the Tathāgata (*tathāgata-garbha*) since all sentient beings have the nature of thusness (*tathatā*). It should be noted that it is possible to interpret this verse as stating that all beings "are" the embryo of the Tathāgata, rather than all beings "have" the embryo.[25] This would imply, however, that all sentient beings will attain buddhahood, a claim that the MSA/Bh does not seem inclined to make. In fact, as we have already seen in the material on gotra, the text states quite clearly that different beings belong to different gotras and that different gotras lead to different forms of awakening; thus not all sentient beings will attain buddhahood. Nevertheless, the text does claim that all sentient beings have the potentiality for attaining buddhahood, even if this potentiality is not actually realized.

The claim that all sentient beings have the potentiality for attaining buddhahood is not such a strange one for the MSA/Bh to make given its affirmation of mind as fundamentally pure in nature. The first half of 13.19 states:

> mataṃ ca cittaṃ prakṛti-prabhāsvaraṃ sadā tad āgantuka-doṣa-dūṣitaṃ/
>
> Mind should properly be thought of as always luminous by nature; it is impure due to adventitious defilements.

The commentary goes on to state that mind is like space, or like water that is pure in itself but made impure by pollutants; and like water, mind can be purified through removing the defilements. Thus from the perspective of the text, insofar as sentient beings have minds, they may attain the state of fundamental purity through the removal of adventitious defilements.

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25. For more on this see Griffiths 1990b: 62-63. Here I am following Griffiths' translation.

The theme of purity is also discussed at 11.13-14, although here it is the nature of reality that is fundamentally pure. MSA 11.13 states:

> tattvaṃ yat satataṃ dvayena rahitaṃ bhrāntes ca saṃniśrayaḥ
> śakyaṃ naiva ca sarvathābhilapituṃ yac cāprapañcātmakaṃ/
> jñeyaṃ heyam atho viśodhyam amalaṃ yac ca prakṛtyā mataṃ
> yasyākāśa-suvarṇa-vāri-sadṛśī kleśād viśuddhir matā//
>
> Reality—which is always without duality, is the basis of error, and is entirely inexpressible—does not have the nature of discursivity. It is to be known, abandoned, and purified. It should properly be thought of as naturally immaculate, since it is purified from defilements, as are space, gold, and water.

As in the commentary to 13.19, the nature of reality—like the nature of mind—is said to be similar to that of space and water: they are naturally pure and defiled only adventitiously. The next verse goes on to state that there is nothing else in the world besides this fundamentally pure reality. Thus at an ontological level the MSA/Bh posits that, even though it serves as the basis of error, reality is fundamentally pure.

This brief preliminary excursus into the domain of the MSA/Bh's ontological discourse is to be understood in relation to our original question: the question of the predetermination of gotra. The moves towards understanding the MSA/Bh's position on the *tathāgatagarbha*-theory and the MSA/Bh's doctrine of the fundamental purity of mind were, I think, necessary in order to properly contextualize the text's pronouncements on gotra. As we have seen, the text posits that: (1) all sentient beings have the potentiality for attaining buddhahood, since all beings have the nature of thusness; (2) all sentient beings have the potentiality for purifying their minds, since mind—like reality itself—is fundamentally pure by nature; and (3) having a gotra is a necessary preliminary to attaining any specific Buddhist soteriological goal. If my

interpretation of these claims is correct, then the MSA/Bh would be involved in a self-contradiction if it were to posit that some sentient beings were absolutely without gotra—that is, if it were to posit that some sentient beings are absolutely without the potentiality for purifying their minds and attaining buddhahood.[26] Thus, if the MSA/Bh is to avoid this situation of self-contradiction, it must not posit that there is a certain category of sentient beings who were predetermined never to obtain any gotra whatsoever.[27] Nor can the text posit that there is a certain category of sentient beings who have absolutely removed themselves from the possibility of obtaining a gotra—since absolutely removing oneself from the possibility of obtaining a gotra would involve altering one's nature, which is thusness.[28]

According to this line of argument, then, in the MSA/Bh gotra represents a category of spiritual potentiality that any sentient being may acquire through amassing roots of good. But while the text posits that all sentient beings have the potentiality for acquiring the bodhisattva-gotra and becoming fully awakened buddhas, it does not hold

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26. It is significant to note in connection with this that the MSA/Bh does not employ the term *icchantika*, a term sometimes used in Indian Buddhist literature to refer to those whose desires are so strong that they are prevented from ever attaining nirvāṇa.

27. Contrary to the line of argument I have developed here, the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* quite clearly states that there is a certain category of sentient beings who will never attain nirvāṇa in any of the three vehicles because they are "unfit vessels" (see Keenan 1980: 690-693). While MSABh ad 9.16 also uses the term "unfit vessels" (*abhājana-bhūteṣu sattveṣu*), it does not seem to thereby imply that some sentient beings will always remain in this condition, or that their nature is anything other than thusness.

28. It is interesting to note that Sthiramati, in his comments to MSA 3.11 (DT sems tsam MI 49a3-49b1), does not seem to have considered the line of argument I develop here. He states that some are just absolutely without the nature of attaining parinirvāṇa, and seems to ignore the contradiction with MSA 9.37 that this implies.

that all beings necessarily realize this potentiality.[29] In fact, according to the text there is always a surplus or remainder of sentient beings who have not been ripened, since the world is infinite.[30] To this extent, according to the MSA/Bh, there are some sentient beings—in that they are indefinitely without roots of good—who are quite far removed from ever actually attaining a gotra, which in itself is a necessary prerequisite for attaining any form of awakening. The text categorizes those beings who are said to have actually attained a gotra according to the three particular gotras of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva—any of which might be definite (unable to be lost) or indefinite (able to be lost). Furthermore the text aligns the three particular gotras with the three vehicles, and they are said to terminate in distinct soteriological goals. The next step in interpreting the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in the MSA/Bh, then, will be to turn to these distinct goals.

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29. Compare this to Haribhadra's theory of gotra as found in the *Abhisamayālaṃkārālokā*, where from the ultimate point of view gotra is seen as non-distinct in all sentient beings; see Ruegg 1968, especially: 316-317, and Mano 1967.

30. MSABh ad 9.49: na ca niḥśeṣaṃ lokasyānantatvāt/.

Chapter 4
Vimukti (liberation)

Introduction

While in the previous chapter I discussed gotra, which is understood to be preliminary to attaining any specific Buddhist soteriological goal, in this and the following three chapters I will discuss the specific soteriological goals referred to in the MSA/Bh. I have distinguished the goals as *vimukti* (liberation), *nirvāṇa*, *bodhi* (awakening), and *buddhatva* (buddhahood), each of which in turn may be linked to gotra.[1] This separation of goals is somewhat artificial, in that the MSA/Bh does not always clearly distinguish one soteriological goal from another, especially in the case of the awakening of a buddha and buddhahood itself. Nevertheless, a case may be made that each goal is interpreted as a distinct type of attainment, or at least as a distinct aspect of some particular attainment. This is most evident in examining the text and seeing how each of the particular terms (*vimukti*, *nirvāṇa*, *bodhi*, *buddhatva*) are used, i.e., in what contexts, in conjunction with which other terms, etc. And discussing the goals separately allows for a more careful analysis of their meanings in the text.

In this chapter I will examine the uses and meanings of the term *vimukti* (liberation) in the MSA/Bh. My aims will be to see what is meant by liberation, whether different types of liberation are distinguished, and how liberation is said to be obtained. While the primary term for liberation I will be looking at is *vimukti*, I will also examine

1. The connection between liberation and gotra may be seen at MSA 3.8; the connections between the other goals and gotra have been discussed in the previous chapter.

significant uses of the synonymous terms *mukti*, *mokṣa*, and *vimokṣa*. I call these terms "synonymous" because I think there is no clear basis for distinguishing their meanings in the verse-text and commentary. In three places where the verse-text uses the term *mukti*, the commentary glosses it with the term *vimukti*.[2] In one location (ad 17.4) the commentary glosses the term *vimuktitaḥ* (an ablative form) with *vimokṣāt* (also an ablative form). And while the commentary to 11.44 equates *vimukti* with the transformation of consciousness (*vijñāna-parāvṛtti*), verse 19.54 equates *mokṣa* with the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*).[3] Thus, given the semantic ranges of the terms *vimukti*, *mukti*, *mokṣa*, and *vimokṣa*, and the contexts of their usage in the MSA/Bh, I will translate each of the terms as "liberation," although in some cases I will specify which Sanskrit term is actually being used.

Probably the most well known Buddhist soteriological goal is nirvāṇa, which has of course been variously interpreted in various contexts, but which has often been understood as a form of liberation. In the next chapter I will examine how the term *nirvāṇa* is used in the MSA/Bh. But here I may at least indicate that it does not emerge as the most important Buddhist soteriological goal in this text. The reasons for this are not too difficult to discern. If sentient existence is understood as a continuous cycle of birth and death (*saṃsāra*) which is determined by actions (*karma*) and afflictions (*kleśa*), then salvation must at a minimum consist in release from this cycle. This has been one

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2. At MSA/Bh 9.35, 11.47, and 11.53.

3. The term *vijñāna-parāvṛtti* may be understood as one form of *āśraya-parāvṛtti*: here the basis that is being transformed is consciousness.

understanding of the concept nirvāṇa: liberation from the cycle of saṃsāra. In the MSA/Bh, however, as in the Mahāyāna in general, there is a noted tendency to deny all forms of duality, including the duality between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The commentary to 6.5 states:

> na cāsti saṃsāra-nirvāṇayoḥ kiṃcin nānākaraṇaṃ paramārtha-vṛttyā nairātmyasya samatayā/
>
> There is not any distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa in the ultimate sense because of their identity in absence of self.

When the ultimate distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is denied, the goal of liberation from cyclic existence no longer maintains its central soteriological role.

The concept of liberation is still, however, employed by the MSA/Bh, but it is not primarily used to refer to liberation from saṃsāra. The concept is also used in reference to liberation from the afflictive and cognitive obstructions (*kleśa-jñeyāvaraṇa*), the attainment of a specific non-dual cognitive state, the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti*), and the attainment of the undefiled realm (*anāsrava-dhātu*). Thus in examining the understanding of liberation at work in the MSA/Bh, I will look at it in terms of these related concepts.

Exegesis of *vimukti*

As mentioned above, one basic understanding of liberation in Buddhism is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. This meaning of the term *vimukti* is also found in the MSA/Bh—in the commentary to 6.5, where it is stated that liberation is

attained as a result of the termination of births[4]—although it is certainly not the most important understanding of the term at work in the text. Another basic understanding of liberation is in terms of a standard list of the eight liberations, often found in other Buddhist texts.[5] The verse-text refers to the eight liberations (*aṣṭa-vimokṣa*) at 7.9 as one of the six means through which the powers of a bodhisattva function.[6]

One important understanding of liberation in the MSA/Bh is liberation from the obstructions (*āvaraṇa*). Generally, Mahāyāna texts speak about two types of obstructions, afflictive (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and cognitive (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). The term *kleśāvaraṇa* is an appositional compound (a type of *karmadhāraya*) formed from the terms *kleśa* (affliction) and *āvaraṇa* (obstruction). The compound may be literally translated as "obstructions which are afflictions," or more simply, "afflictive obstructions." The term *jñeyāvaraṇa*, on the other hand, is a syntactic compound (a *tatpuruṣa*) formed from the terms *jñeya* (object of knowledge) and *āvaraṇa*. In the compound *jñeyāvaraṇa* the term *jñeya* should be understood to be in the locative case, so we might translate the

4. MSABh ad 6.5: tathāpi janma-kṣayān mokṣa-prāptir bhavaty eva . . . /.

5. For an extended discussion of the eight liberations, see Hurvitz 1979, especially: 135-139. According to Hurvitz, these eight liberations correspond to the sphere of form's (*rūpadhātu*) first, second, and fourth *dhyānas*, to the formless sphere's (*ārūpyadhātu*) realms of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither perception nor nonperception, and to the attainment of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*).

6. The other means are the six higher knowledges (*abhijñā*), the three sciences (*vidyā*), the eight supremacies (*abhibhuva*), the ten objects of totality (*kṛtsnāyatana*), and unlimited concentration (*ameya-samādhi*). It may also be noted that MSABh ad 18.85 refers to the eight liberations.

compound as "obstructions in the way of objects of knowledge," "obstructions to objects of knowledge," or more simply, "cognitive obstructions."[7]

In Mahāyāna texts the various attainments of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are sometimes discussed in terms of the removal of these two types of obstructions. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are said to remove the afflictive obstructions and thereby attain nirvāṇa, while bodhisattvas are said to also remove the cognitive obstructions and thereby attain omniscience and buddhahood itself. Thus the Hīnayāna is said to lead to liberation from the afflictive obstructions, while the Mahāyāna is said to lead to liberation from both the afflictive and the cognitive obstructions.

The MSA/Bh adheres to this basic understanding of the obstructions and their relation to the soteriological vehicles. The commentary to 17.4-5 states:

vimuktitaḥ kleśa-vimokṣāc chrāvakāṇāṃ/

Due to liberation means due to the liberation of the śrāvakas from the afflictions. Thus for the śrāvakas liberation means liberation from the afflictive obstructions. In the case of buddhas, however, liberation means liberation from both the afflictive and the

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7. In my understanding of the compound *jñeyāvaraṇa*, I am following the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Sanskrit edition, Dutt 1966: 26), which states: jñeye jñānasya pratighāta āvaraṇam ity ucyate/ "It is called an obstruction because it prevents knowledge of a knowable object." The compound *jñeyāvaraṇa* is discussed by Griffiths et al. 1989: 65-66, note 9; they also take the compound as a *tatpuruṣa* with a locative case-relation. As we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, the MSA/Bh interprets buddhahood in terms of an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance (*sarva-jñeya-sarvākāra-jñāna*; MSABh ad 20-21.58). Thus according to the MSA/Bh, objects of knowledge are not obstacles to buddhahood, but rather, taken in their entirety, are constitutive of the omniscient awareness of buddhahood.

cognitive obstructions.[8] In discussing the verse-text's use of the term *sarvāvaraṇa-nirmukta* (liberated from all obstructions) at 20-21.44, the commentary states:

> atra vimokṣa-viśeṣaṃ bhagavataḥ sarva-kleśa-jṇeyāvaraṇa-nirmuktatayā darśayati/
>
> Here this [verse] shows the special character of the liberation of the blessed one by way of the fact that he is liberated from all the afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

Thus buddhas attain liberation from obstructions which are afflictions and from obstructions to objects of knowledge.[9]

From what has been said above, it may be seen that the liberation of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas does not mean exactly the same thing as the liberation of buddhas—that Hīnayāna liberation is not exactly the same as Mahāyāna liberation. Nevertheless, the MSA/Bh does affirm that the liberations of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas are similar in some way. At 9.14 the verse-text and commentary state that a Tathāgata's transformation is similar to those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas due to the similarity of their liberations.[10] At 11.43, in describing the noble gotra of buddhas, the commentary states that it is similar to the other gotras because its liberation is similar to those of

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8. While MSABh ad 17.4-5 mentions liberation from the afflictive obstructions in connection with śrāvakas, it is clear that bodhisattvas also attain this form of liberation: MSABh ad 14.33 uses the phrase *kleśair vimuktaṃ* in reference to the attainments of bodhisattvas on the path of vision; and MSABh ad 16.27-28 mentions *saṃkleśāt suvimokṣa* in connection with a bodhisattva's perfection of wisdom.

9. In addition to the standard two types of obstructions, MSA/Bh 20-21.23 links the purification of liberation (*vimukti*) and the knowledge of liberation (*vimukti-jñāna*) with the removal of the fourfold obstructions (*caturvidhāvaraṇa*) and the obstruction of prevention (*pratighātāvaraṇa*). It may be noted that in the MSA/Bh other lists of obstructions are also found (see, e.g., MSABh ad 12.20); but here I am concerned only with those obstructions that the text directly relates to liberation.

10. MSABh ad 9.14: vimukti-sāmānyena śrāvaka-pratyekabuddha-samā vṛttiḥ/.

śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.[11] And again, at 11.53 the verse-text states that there is a unity of vehicles because there is a similarity of liberation (i.e., because all three vehicles lead to liberation).

It should be mentioned that each of the words translated above as "similar, similarity" (*sāmānya*, *samā*, *samaṃ*, *samatā*, *tulyatva*) also has a semantic range which extends to "equal, equivalent." Nevertheless, it seems more appropriate to translate the terms as "similar," rather than as "equal": it is clear from the discussion of obstructions that the liberation of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is not exactly equivalent to the liberation of buddhas. The liberations of all three are similar in that all three are liberated from the cycle of saṃsāra, but they are not equivalent in that all three are not liberated from all of the obstructions. Furthermore, at one place in the text (ad 1.9), the commentary states that the śrāvakayāna (i.e., one division of the Hīnayāna) is a means only to a liberation that is without passion (*virāga-vimukti-mātra*), and that this is one way in which the śrāvakayāna is inferior to the Mahāyāna. Thus, according to the text, Mahāyāna liberation is different from, and superior to, Hīnayāna liberation.

We have seen above that in the MSA/Bh liberation is sometimes understood in the context of liberation from the obstructions, which may be afflictive and/or cognitive. The relation between liberation and cognition is also further drawn out in that the text sometimes discusses liberation in the context of a cognitive state. Two places in the commentary use the phrase *cetaḥ-prajñā-vimukti* (ad 9.25 and ad 11.33), the liberation of

11. MSABh ad 11.43: samaṃ vimukti-samatayā śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhaiḥ/.

mind and wisdom.[12] At the first location, the commentary states that the mind and awareness of a buddha do not have the characteristics of attachment and ignorance due to the liberation of mind and wisdom. From the context, then, we can see that the liberation of (both) mind and wisdom is a type of liberation obtained by buddhas. This point is further substantiated by Sthiramati's subcommentary to this verse, where he states that when mind is liberated, nirvāṇa is attained, and when wisdom is liberated, omniscience (*thams cad mkhyen ba'i ye shes*)—that is, buddhahood—is attained.[13]

The commentary to 11.33 also mentions the liberation of mind and wisdom:

> evaṃ śamatha-vipaśyanā-bhāvanābhyāṃ cetaḥ-prajñā-vimukti-lābhe parāvṛttāśrayasya ta eva vikalpā na punar dvayābhāsāḥ pravartante/
>
> Thus when the liberation of mind and wisdom is attained through the cultivation of calmness and insight by one whose basis is transformed, conceptual discriminations no longer function with an appearance of duality.

From this statement we can see that liberation may be understood in a cognitive context: when this form of liberation is attained, there is no longer the appearance of duality. The mind no longer functions through conceptually constructing subject and object. Thus the liberation of mind and wisdom brings about a cognitive shift; dualistic mental constructions are replaced by a non-dual awareness. And this is said to occur when there is the transformation of the basis.

This cognitive aspect of liberation may also be seen at other places in the text. At 6.2 the verse-text states that liberation (*mokṣa*) is the destruction of that which is nothing

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12. On the liberation of mind and wisdom in Pāli literature, see De Silva 1978.

13. MSAVBh ad 9.25 (DT sems tsam MI 120b6).

more than an error (*bhrama-mātra*), and the error that is referred to is the view of self. Thus when one no longer has the cognition of a self, there is liberation. And at 9.35 the verse-text states that the power of awareness (*jñāna*) in liberation (*mukti*) may be brilliant or faint, and the commentary specifies that while the liberation of buddhas is brilliant, that of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is faint. Thus again we see that there are distinct forms of liberation in the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna, and that liberation is related to a form of awareness or cognition.

The cognitive aspect of liberation is perhaps most clearly demonstrated at 19.54 and its commentary:

> akhyāna-khyānatā jñeyā asad-artha-sad-arthayoḥ/
> āśrayasya parāvṛttir mokṣo 'sau kāma-cārataḥ//
>
> asad-arthasya nimittasyākhyānatā sad-arthasya tathatāyāḥ khyānatā āśraya-parāvṛttir veditavyā/ tayā hi tad-akhyānaṃ khyānaṃ ca/ saiva ca mokṣo veditavyaḥ/
>
> The non-perception and perception of what is [respectively] non-existent and existent is the transformation of the basis; that liberation is due to acting in accordance with desire.
>
> When that which is non-existent, i.e., the sign, is not perceived, and that which is existent, i.e., thusness, is perceived, this should be known as the transformation of the basis, because by means of this one is not perceived and the other is. And this itself should be known as liberation.

This verse clearly shows liberation to be a form of cognition: it is the cognition of that which is truly existent, i.e., thusness. As in 11.33 above, this is a form of cognition that is without duality, since thusness is non-dual. And again as in 11.33, this understanding of liberation is directly related to the transformation of the basis; in fact here liberation is equated with the transformation of the basis.

In the eleventh chapter of the MSA/Bh, the commentary announces six verses devoted to the question of liberation (*vimukti*),[14] where again we see the cognitive aspect of liberation and its connection to the transformation of the basis. In order to understand these verses, however, it will first be necessary to examine an earlier verse and its commentary. 11.40 and its commentary state:

> trividha-trividhābhāso grāhya-grāhaka-lakṣaṇaḥ/
> abhūta-parikalpo hi paratantrasya lakṣaṇaṃ//
>
> tatra trividhābhāsaḥ padābhāso 'rthābhāso dehābhāsaś ca/ punas trividhābhāso mana-udgraha-vikalpābhāsaḥ/ mano yat kliṣṭaṃ sarvadā/ udgrahaḥ pañca vijñāna-kāyāḥ/ vikalpo mano-vijñānaṃ/ tatra prathama-trividhābhāso grāhya-lakṣaṇaḥ/ dvitīyo grāhaka-lakṣaṇaḥ/ ity ayam abhūta-parikalpaḥ paratantrasya lakṣaṇaṃ/
>
> The threefold-threefold appearance has the characteristic of object and subject; it is unreal imagination, which is the characteristic of the dependent.
>
> There the threefold appearance is the appearance of words, the appearance of meanings, and the appearance of forms. Again, the threefold appearance is the appearance of mind, apprehension, and conceptual discrimination. Mind is that which is always defiled. Apprehension is the five sensory consciousnesses. Conceptual discrimination is the mental consciousness. There, the first threefold appearance has the characteristic of the object; the second has the characteristic of the subject. This [threefold-threefold appearance] is unreal imagination, [which is] the characteristic of the dependent.

In this verse and commentary we see that the appearance of words, meanings, and forms (or referential objects) is understood as one aspect of the dependent characteristic (*paratantra-lakṣaṇa*): it is the dependent characteristic considered under the aspect of an object. Considered under the aspect of a subject, the dependent characteristic is equated

14. MSA/Bh 11.44-49. MSA/Bh 11.44-46 will be considered here, while MSA/Bh 11.47-49 will be considered in the discussion of the attainment of liberation.

with the five sensory consciousnesses, mental consciousness, and the defiled mind. According to the standard Yogācāra model there are eight forms of consciousness in all: the six basic forms of consciousness (mental consciousness and the five sensory consciousnesses); the defiled mind (*kliṣṭa-manas*) which serves as the basis of ego; and the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) which serves as the basis of all other forms of consciousness. The subject-aspect of the dependent characteristic corresponds to the first seven forms of consciousness. So from 11.40 and its commentary we may infer the following structure:

<u>dependent characteristic</u> (*paratantra-lakṣaṇa*)

<u>object-aspect</u>
appearance of words
appearance of meanings
appearance of forms

<u>subject-aspect</u>
mind (defiled mind)
apprehension (5 sensory consciousnesses)
conceptual discrimination (mental consciousness)
[Note: these 7 consciousnesses are based on the store-consciousness]

Keeping this chart in mind, we may turn to the verses on liberation.

The first of the verses on liberation equates liberation with the transformation of the object-aspect of the dependent characteristic. Verse 11.44 and its commentary state:

> padārtha-deha-nirbhāsa-parāvṛttir anāsravaḥ/
> dhātur bīja-parāvṛtteḥ sa ca sarvatragāśrayaḥ//

> bīja-parāvṛtter ity ālaya-vijñāna-parāvṛttitaḥ/ padārtha-deha-nirbhāsānāṃ vijñānānāṃ parāvṛttir anāsravo dhātur vimuktiḥ/ sa ca sarvatragāśrayaḥ śrāvaka-pratyekabuddha-gataḥ/

> The transformation of the appearance of words, meanings, and forms is the undefiled realm; it is due to the transformation of seeds; and it is the universal basis.
>
> 'Due to the transformation of seeds,' means due to the transformation of the store-consciousness. The transformation of consciousnesses—which have the appearance of words, meanings, and forms—is the undefiled realm, [which is] liberation. And it is the universal basis because it is present in śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

This verse states that liberation is the transformation of forms of consciousness which have the appearance of words, meanings, and forms, i.e., conscious modes of appearance which participate in dualistic conceptual constructions. It states that this transformation comes about through the transformation of seeds, which the commentary specifies as the transformation of the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). The term *ālaya-vijñāna*, which has come to be closely associated with the Yogācāra, appears only a limited number of times in the commentary, and it does not appear in the verse-text at all.[15] Here in the commentary to 11.44, as in the commentary to 19.49, the store-consciousness is equated with seeds, as in the seeds that contribute to, and are contributed by, moments of defiled consciousness. So when there is the transformation of these seeds—of the store-consciousness—the result is a transformation of the object-aspect of the dependent characteristic.

The second verse on liberation discusses it in terms of the transformation of the subject-aspect of the dependent characteristic. 11.45 states:

> caturdhā vaśitāvṛtter manasaś codgrahasya ca/

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15. According to Nagao's index (1958: 53), there are seven uses of the term in the MSABh. Two of the uses occur in the comments to a single verse (19.49).

vikalpasyāvikalpe hi kṣetre jñāne 'tha karmaṇi//

> Due to the reversion of mind, apprehension, and conceptual discrimination, there are four supremacies: in not conceptually discriminating, in a field, in awareness, and in action.

According to the commentary the reversion (*āvṛtti*) of mind, etc. means the transformation (*parāvṛtti*) of them. Recall that the commentary to 11.40 had identified mind, apprehension, and conceptual discrimination as the subject-aspect of the dependent characteristic, so here we see that there is the transformation of this aspect of the dependent characteristic. 11.46 and its commentary discuss the four supremacies in further detail: the verse states that the supremacies begin on the eighth bodhisattva-stage, and the commentary states that supremacy in a field is due to the complete purification of a buddha-field. Thus it is clear that the transformation discussed here applies only to the Mahāyāna.

Considering these first three verses (11.44-46) on liberation together we may see that one important meaning of the term "transformation of the basis" in the MSA/Bh is the transformation of the dependent characteristic. The transformation of the appearance of words, meanings, and forms (i.e., the object-aspect of the dependent characteristic) is due to the transformation of seeds (i.e., the store-consciousness, which is the ground of the subject-aspect of the dependent characteristic). And this is equated with liberation (at ad 11.44). Thus one interpretation of liberation in the MSA/Bh is the transformation of the dependent characteristic. And since (according to 11.46) the supremacies that result from this transformation occur on various high-level bodhisattva-stages, we can infer that

the MSA/Bh understands the transformation of the dependent characteristic to be a Mahāyāna phenomenon.

But there may be a problem with this conclusion: 11.44 states that the transformation of the appearance of words, meanings, and forms is the universal basis (*sarvatragāśraya*), and the commentary specifies that this is because it is also the basis of (the attainments of) śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. So does the Hīnayāna also lead to the transformation of the dependent characteristic? Davidson (1985: 238) suggests that the commentary is mistaken here, and that the term "universal basis" is probably a reference to 2.3, which discusses four forms of universality that buddhas possess. While this is an interesting suggestion, I am not sure that it is correct: in two other places in the text the term *sarvatraga* is also used in reference to all three vehicles.[16] It seems more reasonable to conclude that the commentary means that the transformation of the store-consciousness (at least in the sense of its elimination) is a phenomenon that occurs both in the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna.[17] And the transformation of the store-consciousness corresponds to the transformation of the object-aspect of the dependent characteristic. But it would be incorrect to state that the MSA/Bh posits that the complete transformation of the dependent characteristic occurs in the Hīnayāna, since, according to the text, the transformation of the subject-aspect of the dependent characteristic leads to supremacies which are specific to buddhas and bodhisattvas.

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16. MSABh ad 2.3 (extant only in Tibetan; DT sems tsam PHI 134b4-5: *kun du 'gro* is the Tibetan term used for *sarvatraga*) and ad 12.6.

17. According to Schmithausen (1987: 204), the *Yogācārabhūmi* states that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do eliminate the store-consciousness.

More is said about the transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti*) and its relation to liberation in a section of the text that specifically addresses that topic.[18] In 9.12-17 we see that the transformation of the basis of a buddha is clearly distinguished from the transformations of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. In the verse that discusses ten aspects of a buddha's transformation of the basis (9.14), we have already seen that a buddha's transformation is similar to those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas because of the similarity of their liberations. The same verse also continues by stating that a buddha's transformation is superior (*viśiṣṭa*), because of a buddha's unequalled qualities of the ten powers, the four confidences, etc.[19] From this verse we can see that the transformation of the basis is not exactly equivalent to liberation. In fact, according to 9.14, liberation pertains to one aspect of the transformation of the basis. Thus while 19.54 had equated liberation with the transformation of the basis, the two terms should not be taken as exactly synonymous. The transformation of the basis is a process, or rather a set of related processes, of which liberation is one aspect or result.

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18. Only the term *āśraya-parāvṛtti* is used by the verse-text itself (at MSA 11.17, 14.29, 14.45, and 19.54). However, the verse-text does use the term *tathāgatānāṃ parivṛtti* (the transformation of tathāgatas) at MSA 9.14. And according to the commentary, this occurs in one of the verses on *āśraya-parāvṛtti*. Furthermore, the commentary uses the terms *āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti* interchangeably; e.g., while MSABh intro ad 9.12-17 uses *-parāvṛtti*, MSABh ad 9.12 itself uses *-parivṛtti*. Takasaki (1966: 41-44) argues that in the context of the MSA/Bh, *āśraya-parāvṛtti* means a "change of basis (from A to B)," while *āśraya-parivṛtti* refers to a manifestation of reality. A closer examination, however, reveals that at one location (MSABh ad 11.4) *āśraya-parivṛtti* is used to refer to a "change of basis (from A to B)" (the text is here referring to a change in gender), and at another location (MSABh ad 9.60) *āśraya-parāvṛtti* is used in relation to the *svābhāviko-dharmakāya*, that is, in reference to a manifestation of reality. Thus there does not seem to be any strong reason for distinguishing *āśraya-parāvṛtti* from *-parivṛtti* in the MSA/Bh. For an extended discussion of *āśraya-parāvṛtti/-parivṛtti* in the MSA/Bh, see Davidson 1985: 228-254 and 261-273.

19. MSABh ad 9.14: bala-vaiśāradyādibhiḥ buddha-dharmair asamatvād viśiṣṭā vṛttiḥ/.

Another term that is offered as equivalent to liberation in the MSA/Bh is the undefiled realm (*anāsrava-dhātu*). As we saw above in the commentary to 11.44, the transformation of consciousnesses is equated with the undefiled realm, which is then equated with liberation. According to the commentary, one section of the text is specifically devoted to the topic of the undefiled realm.[20] At 9.36 the verse-text states that the profundity of buddhas in the undefiled realm is described by the text in terms of its defining characteristics, location, and action. In terms of action, as stated above, 9.35 states that the power of awareness in liberation may be brilliant or faint. This is the only mention of liberation (*mukti*) in this group of verses, thus liberation is not precisely synonymous with the undefiled realm; rather, it represents one aspect of the undefiled realm.

Given these various meanings of liberation in the text, I will now consider how the attainment of liberation is discussed in the text. One common way of describing the attainment of liberation in Buddhism is in terms of the three entrances to liberation: emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness (*śūnyatā*, *animitta*, *apraṇihita*). These standard means to liberation are also discussed in the MSA/Bh. At 11.3 the commentary states that the abhidharma teaches the entrances to liberation, although here the text does not specify them. At 11.47-49 the three entrances to liberation are discussed in further detail, although the particular terms *śūnyatā*, *animitta*, and *apraṇihita* are not used. At 11.47 the verse-text states:

viditvā nairātmyaṃ dvividham iha dhīmān bhavagataṃ/

20. MSA/Bh 9.22-37. On this section of the text see Griffiths 1990b.

samaṃ tac ca jñātvā praviśati sa tattvaṃ grahaṇataḥ/
tatas tatra sthānān manasa iha na khyāti tad api/
tad-akhyānaṃ muktiḥ parama upalambhasya vigamaḥ//

The wise one, understanding the two absences of self in the world and knowing them to be equal, attains reality through comprehension. Then, through fixing one's mind there, in just that place one does not perceive even that; not perceiving that is the most excellent liberation, which is the cessation of perception.

Although neither the verse nor the commentary mentions emptiness (*śūnyatā*), from the context I think it is clear that this verse describes that entrance to liberation. Here I am taking the absence of self in persons and phenomena as equivalent to emptiness, an identification that is explicitly made in the commentary to 18.77.[21] The verse quoted above is quite interesting because it identifies the attainment of liberation with a form of non-perception. The commentary specifies that first the bodhisattva realizes the reality (*tattva*) of representation-only (*vijñapti-mātra*), but then, through fixing one's mind there, the bodhisattva does not even perceive the reality of representation-only.[22] In a similar way, the commentary to 6.6-9 states that while a bodhisattva first arrives at mind-only (*citta-mātra*), later he realizes that even mind-only does not exist.[23] So while representation-only and mind-only have sometimes been recognized as fundamental ontological doctrines of Yogācāra discourse, for the MSA/Bh these doctrines require

21. MSABh ad 18.77: pudgala-dharma-nairātmyaṃ śūnyatā-samādheḥ/.

22. MSABh ad 11.47: tatas tatra tattva-vijñapti-mātra-sthānān manasas tad api tattvaṃ na khyāti vijñapti-mātraṃ/.

23. MSABh ad 6.6-9: cittād anyad ālambanaṃ grāhyaṃ nāstīty avagamya buddhyā tasyāpi citta-mātrasya nāstitvāvagamanaṃ grāhya-bhāve grāhakābhāvāt/.

further qualification: representation-only and mind-only do not have ultimate validity because they are not ultimately real.[24]

The text continues by discussing the other two entrances to liberation: signlessness and wishlessness. At 11.48 the verse-text and commentary describe the entrance through designation-only (*nāma-mātra*), the realization that objects are nothing but designations.[25] If we understand a designation to be a type of sign, then this corresponds to the entrance through signlessness (*animitta*). And at 11.49 the verse-text describes the entrance to liberation that is a result of no longer being fettered by the view of self (*ātma-darśana*). The commentary specifies that when the mind is not fettered by this view, it no longer perceives objects. I take this to be a reference to the entrance through wishlessness (*apraṇihita*), since when the mind does not perceive objects, it can no longer desire them. Furthermore, the commentary to 18.77 explicitly identifies the cessation of grasping at the self with wishlessness. So while the MSA/Bh does not use the standard terms for the entrances to liberation at 11.47-49, we may reasonably infer that *śūnyatā*, *animitta*, and *apraṇihita* are implicitly referred to in those three verses, as follows:

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24. For a discussion of similar claims in the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (1.7-8) see Ruegg 1977: 23-24.

25. MSABh ad 11.48: nāma-mātraṃ paśyann-ity abhilāpa-mātram artha-rahitaṃ/ . . . tat-paśyaṃs tad api bhūyo naiva paśyaty arthābhāve tad-vijñapaty-adarśanād ity ayam anupalambho vimuktiḥ/ "'Seeing designation only' means [that one sees] only the expression, without any object. . . . Seeing that, moreover, one does not see even that, because there is no perception of the designation of that [object] when the object does not exist. This absence of perception is liberation."

standard entrance to liberation	term used by the MSA/Bh	comments
emptiness (*śūnyatā*)	twofold absence of self (*dvividha-nairātmya*)	explicitly equated at MSABh ad 18.77
signlessness (*animitta*)	designation only (*nāma-mātra*)	infer that designations are a type of sign
wishlessness (*apraṇihita*)	absence of view of self (*ātma-darśana*)	MSABh ad 18.77 equates absence of grasping at the self with wishlessness[26]

Another understanding of the attainment of liberation is referred to in 11.1, the second half of which states:

vāsana-bodhana-śamana-prativedhais tad vimocayati//

Through infusing, comprehending, pacifying, and penetrating, one is liberated. The commentary goes on to equate infusing with hearing (*śruta*), comprehending with reflecting (*cintā*), pacifying with calmness (*śamatha*), and penetrating with insight (*vipaśyanā*). If both of the latter two are taken as aspects of cultivating (*bhāvanā*), then the standard three aspects of practice (*śruta-cintā-bhāvanā*) are listed here as a means to liberation.

Other discussions of the attainment of liberation in the text come up in the context of discussions of the five paths (*pañca-mārga*). The five paths are one standard way in which Buddhist soteriological attainments are discussed; they are normally listed as the paths of accumulation, application, vision, cultivation, and completion (respectively, the

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26. In addition to MSABh ad 18.77, the terms *śūnyatā*, *animitta*, and *apraṇihita* are used in the verse-text at MSA 14.34 and 35, in a discussion of the path of vision—which is linked to liberation.

saṃbhāra-, *prayoga-*, *darśana-*, *bhāvanā-*, and *niṣṭhā-mārga*).[27] The MSA/Bh employs the conception of the five paths, and discusses each of them at some length in the fourteenth chapter.[28] Here I will focus, however, only on the paths of vision (*darśana-mārga*) and cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*). According to the commentary, the former is discussed at 14.28-41 and the latter is discussed at 14.42-46.

One important aspect of the paths of vision and cultivation is the elimination of obstructions. At 14.33 the verse-text states that on the path of vision, one is liberated by means of vision,[29] and here the commentary specifies that one is liberated from the afflictions (*kleśa*). This state of liberation is attained through the obtainment of a particular form of awareness. A previous verse on the path of vision (14.28) states:

> dvaya-grāha-visaṃyuktaṃ lokottaram anuttaraṃ/
> nirvikalpaṃ malāpetaṃ jñānaṃ sa labhate punaḥ//
>
> Then one obtains an awareness that is not associated with grasping after duality, supramundane, unsurpassed, without conceptual discrimination, and free from impurities.

The commentary states that this awareness is unsurpassed because it is by means of the unsurpassed vehicle (*yānānantarya*), a reference to the Mahāyāna. Thus it should be kept in mind that the path of vision discussed in the MSA/Bh is the path of vision of bodhisattvas: it is the Mahāyāna *darśana-mārga*, but not the Hīnayāna *darśana-mārga*.

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27. For a discussion of various Yogācāra conceptions of paths, see Davidson 1985: 342-382.

28. It may be noted, however, that while the commentary specifically mentions all five paths (see, e.g., MSABh ad 1.15 and ad 18.103), the verse-text itself only explicitly mentions the paths of vision (MSA 14.33, 36) and cultivation (MSA 14.45).

29. MSA 14.33: tad-abhāvasya bhāvaṃ ca vimuktaṃ dṛṣṭi-hāyibhiḥ/ labdhvā darśana-mārgo hi tadā tena nirucyate//.

Thus the Mahāyāna path of vision is obtained when there is a non-dual awareness which is free from conceptual discrimination. And this path of vision brings about liberation from the afflictions. So again we see the strong link between non-dual awareness and liberation. The verse-text also states that the attainment of the path of vision occurs on the first bodhisattva-stage, and that it is a transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*).[30] And so again, we see liberation—here, liberation from the afflictions—as an aspect of the transformation of the basis.

While liberation from the afflictive obstructions is obtained on the path of vision, liberation from all obstructions—afflictive and cognitive—is obtained at the culmination of the path of cultivation. In discussing the attainment of the path of cultivation, the second half of 14.45 and its commentary state:

> niṣṭhāśraya-parāvṛttiṃ sarvāvaraṇa-nirmalāṃ//
>
> tato niṣṭhā-gatām āśraya-parāvṛttiṃ labhate sarva-kleśa-jñeyāvaraṇa-nirmalāṃ/
>
> The complete transformation of the basis is purified from all obstructions.
>
> Then the complete transformation of the basis is attained, which is purified from all afflictive and cognitive obstructions.

In 14.45 and its commentary, the use of the term *niṣṭhā* is certainly a reference to the *niṣṭhā-mārga* (the path of completion), which is the final stage of spiritual development in the fivefold scheme outlined above, and which immediately follows the path of cultivation. While we have already seen that the path of vision entails a transformation of the basis (14.29), here we see that the culmination of the path of cultivation entails

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30. MSA 14.29ab: sāsyāśraya-parāvṛttiḥ prathamā bhūmir iṣyate/.

another transformation of the basis, the *complete* transformation of the basis (*niṣṭhāśraya-parāvṛtti*). This transformation brings about the purification of all obstructions and leads to the awareness of all modes of appearance (*sarvākāra-jñatā*). So here we see that another transformation of the basis occurs, thus the transformation of the basis should not be understood as one determinate process which is the same for all. Rather, it is a set of related processes, and the transformation processes of bodhisattvas differ from those of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Comments on the types of *vimukti*

As we have seen, one standard understanding of the term *vimukti* is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. But since the MSA/Bh posits that the highest form of awareness is a non-dual, non-conceptually-constructing awareness, the text regards all dualities as only provisional. Thus the duality between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is not accepted as ultimately true. And so the primary understanding of liberation at work in the text is not liberation from saṃsāra. Nevertheless, the concept *vimukti* is employed rather often in the text. From what was said above, however, we can note the following primary senses of the synonymous terms *vimukti*, *mokṣa*, *mukti*, and *vimokṣa* in the MSA/Bh. (1) Liberation from the obstructions: here Hīnayāna liberation entails liberation from the afflictive obstructions, while Mahāyāna liberation entails liberation from both the afflictive and the cognitive obstructions. (2) Liberation of the mind and wisdom: here liberation is understood as a non-dual form of awareness that does not engage in conceptual constructions. This is interpreted as a Mahāyāna form of liberation.

(3) Liberation as the transformation of appearances, which is due to the transformation of seeds. As discussed above, this account of liberation is linked to the transformation of the dependent characteristic, which is a Mahāyāna phenomenon. And (4) liberation as an aspect of the transformation of the basis: here the processes comprising Mahāyāna transformations of the basis are more extensive than the processes comprising Hīnayāna transformations of the basis.

Keeping these senses of the term *vimukti* in mind, and also keeping in mind the discussion of how liberation is attained, it becomes quite evident that the MSA/Bh posits a clear difference between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna liberation. While both vehicles are understood to lead to liberation from cyclic existence, according to the MSA/Bh, Hīnayāna liberation means little more than this. Again, as the commentary to 1.9 states, the śrāvakayāna (viz., Hīnayāna) is a means only to a form of liberation that is without passion. From the MSA/Bh's perspective, however, Mahāyāna liberation entails liberation from all obstructions whatsoever and the attainment of a form of non-dual awareness, which is said to lead to omniscience itself.

Chapter 5
Nirvāṇa

Introduction

As I remarked in the previous chapter, although nirvāṇa has certainly been considered as one of the most important Buddhist soteriological goals, it does not emerge as the most important soteriological concept in the MSA/Bh. While one standard interpretation of nirvāṇa is liberation from saṃsāra, we saw in the previous chapter that liberation is not primarily defined in terms of liberation from cyclic existence. More important to the MSA/Bh is the understanding of liberation as liberation from the cognitive and afflictive obstructions, which is said to lead to the attainment of a non-dual awareness of thusness. And positing such a non-dual awareness entails the view that all forms of duality, including the duality between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, are ultimately untenable. Thus, rather than being understood as the highest soteriological goal, nirvāṇa is interpreted as an aspect of one more duality that must be left behind.

Having denied the duality between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, however, the MSA/Bh offers a reinterpretation of nirvāṇa: non-abiding nirvāṇa ("unlocated nirvāṇa," "non-resting nirvāṇa"; *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*), or nirvāṇa that abides in neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa. When non-abiding nirvāṇa is attained, according to the text, buddhas and bodhisattvas are neither limited by the karmic and afflictive constraints of saṃsāra, nor are they immersed (or, perhaps, dispersed) in an eternally quiescent state of nirvāṇa; rather, they acquire the ability to manifest in the conditioned world in whatever form is appropriate in order to come to the aid of sentient beings. According to the MSA/Bh, this

means that sometimes buddhas will even manifest themselves in a world and appear to attain perfect awakening and parinirvāṇa. Interpreted in terms of non-abiding nirvāṇa, then, the attainment of parinirvāṇa is not a central soteriological goal, but rather is a particular action manifested by buddhas in order to lead sentient beings to the path of awakening.

In this chapter I will examine various understandings of the term nirvāṇa which are present in the MSA/Bh. I will look at the different types of nirvāṇa which are discussed in the text and examine how these various types are related to other soteriological concepts. And I will attempt to discern how different conceptions of nirvāṇa relate to the distinction in the MSA/Bh between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna. Since nirvāṇa has classically been understood as an unconditioned state, in my analysis of the concept of nirvāṇa I will try to point out how different conceptions of nirvāṇa relate to different understandings of what it means to be unconditioned.

Exegesis of *nirvāṇa*

In La Vallée Poussin's translation of the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, the following four types of nirvāṇa are identified: *anādikālika-prakṛti-śuddha-nirvāṇa* (naturally pure nirvāṇa from beginningless time), *sopadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* (nirvāṇa with residual conditioning), *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* (nirvāṇa without residual conditioning), and *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* (non-abiding nirvāṇa).[1] While this precise list in not offered by the

1. See La Vallée Poussin 1929: 670-671. These four are also listed at *Mahāvyutpatti* 1725-1728 (ed. Sakaki 1926), although there the first member of the list is simply *nirvāṇa*.

MSA/Bh, it is quite useful for identifying the various types of nirvāṇa distinguished in the text. I will begin with the first type of nirvāṇa.

At 18.80 the verse-text mentions the four summaries of the dharma, which the commentary specifies as follows: all conditioned things are impermanent (*sarva-saṃskārā anityāḥ*), all conditioned things are suffering (*sarva-saṃskārā duḥkhāḥ*), all phenomena are without self (*sarva-dharmā anātmāna*), and nirvāṇa is peace (*śāntaṃ nirvāṇam*). In the following verse and its commentary (18.81), the text correlates each of the four statements with one of the three characteristics (*trilakṣaṇa*). Here the commentary states:

> vikalpopaśamārthaḥ śāntārthaḥ pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇaṃ nirvāṇaṃ/
>
> The meaning of 'peace' is 'the cessation of conceptual discrimination'; [this is] the perfected characteristic, nirvāṇa.

Thus from these two verses we see that one understanding of nirvāṇa is peace (*śānta*), which is further specified as the cessation of conceptual discrimination and the perfected characteristic.

In a discussion of the lack of nature of all phenomena, the commentary to 11.51 states:

> yo hi niḥsvabhāvaḥ so 'nutpanno yo 'nutpannaḥ so 'niruddho yo 'niruddhaḥ sa ādiśānto ya ādiśāntaḥ sa prakṛti-parinirvṛta/
>
> That which is without nature is unarisen; that which is unarisen is unobstructed; that which is unobstructed is originally at peace; that which is originally at peace is naturally in a state of parinirvāṇa.

Here I have translated the term *prakṛti-parinirvṛta* as "naturally in a state of parinirvāṇa." *Parinirvṛta* is a past passive participle formed from the verbal root *vṛ* (meaning "to

obstruct, to restrain") with the prefixes *nir-* (a negative prefix) and *pari-* (meaning "fully"). So we might define *parinirvṛta* as "completely unobstructed, completely emancipated." And although the term *parinirvāṇa* is derived from a different verbal root (*vā*, "to blow"; *pari-nir-vā*, "to be completely blown out, to be fully extinguished," but also "to be fully allayed," or "fully exhilarated"), its meanings correspond to the meanings we have given to *parinirvṛta*.[2] Thus to say that something is *prakṛti-parinirvṛta* is equivalent to saying that it is in a state of *prakṛti-parinirvāṇa*.

In the commentary to 11.51, again we see that nirvāṇa is equated with peace (*śānta*). But here it is clear that "peace" does not refer to a psychological state of an individual, but rather to an ontological characteristic of all phenomena: all phenomena are originally at peace because fundamentally they are unarisen and unobstructed. Thus according to 11.51, the statement that nirvāṇa is peace refers to the fundamental lack of any independent nature of all phenomena; it does not refer to the quiescent state attained by arhats. And it is in reference to this fundamental lack of independent nature that we should understand the commentary to 18.81, which equates nirvāṇa with the perfected characteristic and the cessation of conceptual discrimination. All phenomena lack independent nature, and in this sense they participate in the perfected characteristic, which is devoid of any form of conceptual construction. This fundamental lack of independent nature is the peace—the nirvāṇa—of all phenomena. So here we have the

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2. Collins (1998: 191-198) discusses the term (pari-)nirvāṇa. He states that while modern historical philology derives *nirvāṇa* from the root *nir-vā* (as I have above), the related Pāli term *nibbuta* is derived from *nir-vṛ*, which further substantiates the relationship between the terms *parinirvāṇa* and *parinirvṛta*.

first type of nirvāṇa mentioned in the list above: the naturally pure nirvāṇa from beginningless time, which is the fundamental state of nirvāṇa of all phenomena.

The second type of nirvāṇa in the list—*sopadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, or nirvāṇa with residual conditioning—is not specifically referred to by the MSA/Bh. Briefly, this type of nirvāṇa is attained by arhats before the termination of their last rebirth. All of the afflictive obstructions have been completely cut off, so there will be no more rebirths, and in this sense nirvāṇa has been obtained. However, there is still residual conditioning from previously accumulated karma, which accounts for the continuation of conditioned existence during the last rebirth of an arhat. Again, while no specific mention of this form of nirvāṇa is made by the MSA/Bh, there is no reason to think that the text would not affirm it as one form of nirvāṇa. In fact, the term "nirvāṇa *without* residual conditioning" (a term which the text is explicitly interested in) only makes sense in opposition to the term "nirvāṇa *with* residual conditioning" (even though this latter term is not explicitly used).

While nirvāṇa with residual conditioning applies to arhats before the termination of their last rebirth, nirvāṇa without residual conditioning (*nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* or *anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*) is the form of nirvāṇa attained by arhats after the termination of their last rebirth. It is important to note that in every instance where either the term *nirupadhiśeṣa-* or *anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* is used by the MSA/Bh, it is to state the same basic idea: the attainments of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are destroyed in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, but the attainments of bodhisattvas are not cut off in this form of nirvāṇa. In the chapter on gotra, the verse-text states that the pre-eminence of the

bodhisattva-gotra is indicated in one way by the imperishability of its roots of good. The commentary (ad 3.3) contrasts this situation with that of śrāvakas:

> na cākṣayāṇy anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇāvasānatvāt/
>
> Nor are [the roots of good of the śrāvakas] indestructible, because of their cessation in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning.

But it is not only the roots of good of śrāvakas that are cut off in this form of nirvāṇa. Later in the text, we also see that the meditation of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is also terminated in *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*. When the verse-text states that the meditation (*dhyāna*) of non-bodhisattvas is perishable (*kṣayi*), the commentary (ad 16.50) specifies:

> kṣayi śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhānāṃ nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇe tat-kṣayāt/
>
> The [meditation] of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is perishable because of its destruction in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning.

Thus the contemplative activity of both śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas ceases in *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*. Bodhisattvas, however, do not attain this form of nirvāṇa. Thus, according to the text, neither their supremacies (ad 2.10), nor their teaching (*dharma*) (ad 11.76), nor their perfections (ad 16.41), nor their compassion (ad 17.35), nor their knowledge of treatises (ad 18.25-26), nor their cultivation of mindfulness (ad 18.43-44) is destroyed in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. So the cessation of attainments in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning only occurs for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

What may be inferred from the text's claims that the attainments of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are brought to an end in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning? Does this imply that according to the MSA/Bh śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas completely cease to exist when they attain *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*? While neither the verse-text nor the

commentary specifically states this, I think it is a reasonable implication to draw from the text. First, considering the contextual semantic evidence, in every place where the term *anupadhiśeṣa-* or *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa* is used, some form of the term *kṣaya* is also used in the same phrase. *Kṣaya* is a nominal form derived from the verbal root *kṣi*, which means "to destroy, to make an end of." Thus for *kṣaya*, we have "loss, destruction, end, termination," and so the attainments of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are described in terms of their "loss, destruction, end, termination." But as we saw above, the text stresses that the attainments of bodhisattvas do not meet such a "destruction." Rather, their attainments are eternal. Furthermore, bodhisattvas themselves become eternal when they attain the *dharma-kāya*, but śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas do not attain the eternal *dharma-kāya*.[3] And finally, at 2.9 the verse-text states that bodhisattvas are delivered from both existence and peace, and here the commentary states that this is because bodhisattvas abide in neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa.[4] So here saṃsāra is equated with existence and nirvāṇa is equated with peace; but since this form of peace is set up over against existence, it is quite reasonable to assume that this peace is a form of non-existence. Thus, even though it is not directly stated by the text, given these various pieces of evidence, it is reasonable to infer that the MSA/Bh posits that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas cease to exist in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning.

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3. The *dharma-kāya* is further discussed in Chapter 7 of this study.

4. The Sanskrit text of this verse is not available. The Tibetan text of MSA 2.9d (DT sems tsam PHI 3b4) reads: bag chags bzlog cid srid dang zhi las rnam par grol ba 'thob/.

Bodhisattvas do not attain *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, but rather attain *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*, non-abiding nirvāṇa, which is the fourth form of nirvāṇa from our initial list. 17.32 is devoted specifically to the topic of non-abiding nirvāṇa:

> vijñāya saṃsāra-gataṃ samagraṃ duḥkhātmakaṃ caiva nirātmakaṃ ca/
> nodvegam āyāti na cāpi doṣaiḥ prabādhyate kāruṇiko 'gra-buddhiḥ//
>
> sarvaṃ saṃsāraṃ yathā-bhūtaṃ parijñāya bodhisattvo nodvegam āyāti kāruṇikatvāt/ na doṣair bādhyate 'gra-buddhitvāt/ evaṃ nirvāṇe pratiṣṭhito bhavati na saṃsāre yathā-kramaṃ/
>
> Knowing that all of saṃsāra has precisely the nature of suffering and is without self, the compassionate one, possessed of the foremost understanding, does not become agitated, nor is he constrained by faults.
>
> Having fully comprehended all of saṃsāra as it truly is, the bodhisattva does not become agitated because he is compassionate. Nor is he constrained by faults because he is possessed of foremost understanding. Thus he is established neither in nirvāṇa nor saṃsāra.

This idea of being established in neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa is a possibility for the text insofar as the text has already denied the ultimate distinction between the two: as we have seen, the commentary to 6.5 states that there is no distinction between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa in the ultimate sense. For buddhas, both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are said to have "one taste" (*ekarasa*) (2.3). One important point to note from the quote above is that bodhisattvas attain non-abiding nirvāṇa due to their compassion for sentient beings. Śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, however, aim for parinirvāṇa to achieve only their own benefit.[5]

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5. See, e.g., MSABh ad 1.9 and ad 1.10.

As for the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa, the text offers conflicting indications of when it occurs. In the section of the text which discusses the etymology of the bodhisattva-stages, 20-21.36 states that the sixth bodhisattva-stage, Abhimukhī, is so called because it faces (*ābhimukhya*) both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The commentary further states that it faces saṃsāra and nirvāṇa because it is not established in either one.[6] This would seem to indicate that non-abiding nirvāṇa is attained on the sixth bodhisattva-stage. However, in the verses that list the ten aspects of the Mahāyāna (19.61-62), the commentary states that non-abiding nirvāṇa is attained in the three final stages (eighth to tenth bodhisattva-stages).[7] Although the text offers conflicting indications, it does seem to more clearly affirm the latter (eighth-to-tenth-stage attainment) rather than the former (sixth-stage attainment), since the latter is explicitly stated, while the former is an inference based on a verse offering an etymology.

The text links the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa with other soteriological concepts. In the commentary to 9.14, the MSABh states that the transformation (*parivṛtti*) of Tathāgatas is non-dual with regard to both conditioned and unconditioned because it abides in neither saṃsāra nor nirvāṇa.[8] Also at 9.45 the verse-text states that in the transformation of abodes (*pratiṣṭhās*), buddhas attain non-abiding nirvāṇa, which

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6. MSABh ad 20-21.36: sā hi prajñā-pāramitāśrayeṇa nirvāṇa-saṃsārayor apratiṣṭhānāt saṃsāra-nirvāṇayor abhimukhī/.

7. MSABh ad 19.61-62: kṣetra-pariśodhanam apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇaṃ cāvinivartanīyāyāṃ bhūmau trividhāyāṃ/.

8. MSABh ad 9.14: saṃsāra-nirvāṇāpratiṣṭhitatvāt saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtatvenādvayā vṛttiḥ/.

according to the commentary is the undefiled realm of buddhas.[9] So from these two verses we see that non-abiding nirvāṇa is an aspect of the transformation of the basis and that—like *vimukti*—it is equated with the undefiled realm (*anāsrava-dhātu*), the state in which the influx of afflictions ceases.

The concept of non-abiding nirvāṇa is also linked to the four awarenesses attained by a buddha.[10] At 9.70, the verse-text and commentary state:

> sattveṣu samatā-jñānaṃ bhāvanā-śuddhito mataṃ[11]/
> apratiṣṭha-samāviṣṭaṃ samatā-jñānam iṣyate//
>
> yad bodhisattvenābhisamaya-kale sattveṣu[12] samatā-jñānaṃ pratilabdhaṃ tad bhāvanā-śuddhito bodhi-prāptasyāpratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇe niviṣṭaṃ samatā-jñānam iṣyate/
>
> The awareness of equality among sentient beings is properly thought to be purified through cultivation. It is known as the equality-awareness because it has entered the equality which is non-abiding.
>
> The awareness of equality among sentient beings, obtained by the bodhisattva at the moment of realization, is purified through cultivation. When awakening is attained, it is known as the equality-awareness because it has entered non-abiding nirvāṇa.

Here we see that the equality-awareness is so called because of its entrance into non-abiding nirvāṇa. What is interesting about this verse and its commentary is that they

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9. MSA 9.45: pratiṣṭhāyāḥ parāvṛttau vibhutvaṃ labhyate paraṃ/ apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇaṃ buddhānām amale pade//. Note: I am reading *amale* for *acale*, following Lévi's emendation (1911: 81), Funahashi (1985: 34), and the Tibetan (*dri med*).

10. I will discuss these more fully in Chapter 7, on buddhahood.

11. Lévi's edition (1907: 47) reads *'malaṃ*. Here I am following Funahashi (1985: 39) and the Tibetan (*'dod*).

12. Following Lévi's emendation (1911: 89), Funahashi (1985: 39), and the Tibetan (*dus na sems can rnams*), I am reading *-kāle sattveṣu* for *-kāleṣu*.

posit a link between the attainment of awakening and the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa. The link established between them, however, is rather ambiguous: there does not seem to be, for example, any sort of causal link. Nevertheless, it may still be noted that the text understands the equality-awareness at least partially in terms of the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa.

Finally we should note that in the MSA/Bh the concept of nirvāṇa is related to the salvific activity of buddhas. First, when non-abiding nirvāṇa is attained, the text states that it serves as a skill in means for preventing the path from being cut off, so that sentient beings might be ripened and brought to awakening.[13] Furthermore, nirvāṇa is related to the salvific activity of buddhas in that buddhas may appear to attain parinirvāṇa in order to liberate sentient beings. At 9.64 the verse-text states that buddhas manifest themselves through embodiments of transformation (*nirmāṇa-kāya*), and one particular mode of manifestation which is mentioned in many places in the text is a buddha's appearing to attain final nirvāṇa. In fact this is the single most common context in which the term *nirvāṇa* is used by the MSA/Bh.[14] So while final nirvāṇa is the ultimate goal for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, for buddhas it is just a particular manifestation of an embodiment of transformation, which has the intended aim of leading sentient beings to take up the path to awakening.

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13. MSABh ad 18.69-70 lists five forms of skill in means (*upāya-kauśalya*), the last of which is *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*. For the complete list see Chapter 12, note 6.

14. This is the context of the term's use at MSA/Bh ad 9.14, ad 9.17, 9.51, 9.64, ad 14.42-46, ad 19.60, ad 19.62, and ad 19.75.

Comments on *nirvāṇa* as unconditioned

One standard view of nirvāṇa presents it as an unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) phenomenon, which stands in opposition to the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) phenomena of saṃsāra.[15] And as we saw in the four summaries of the dharma (18.80), all conditioned phenomena (saṃsāra) are characterized by suffering, while nirvāṇa (an unconditioned phenomenon) is characterized by peace. So on the Buddhist view, in order to terminate suffering, it is necessary to eradicate conditioned phenomena: to attain an unconditioned state. That such a state is indeed possible is a necessary postulate of any form of Buddhism which affirms the four noble truths—indeed it is perhaps *the* necessary postulate of such forms of Buddhism.

The problem with this whole conceptualization, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, is that it affirms a strong duality between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, between the conditioned and the unconditioned. The MSA/Bh, positing that the highest goal is a non-dual awareness of thusness, denies any form of duality, even a duality between the conditioned and the unconditioned. But it still must affirm that there is a way out of conditioned existence—a form of existence characterized by suffering; it must affirm that there is a prescription for the termination of suffering. Without affirming this, the MSA/Bh would have to jettison the four noble truths and the four summaries of the

15. The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* ad 1.7ab (Sanskrit ed., Pradhan 1967: 4) defines conditioned phenomena as follows: sametya saṃbhūya pratyayaiḥ kṛtā iti saṃskṛtāḥ/ "'Conditioned' means 'created by conditions having come together, having occurred together.'" Thus the term *asaṃskṛta* would mean 'not created by conditions.' The *Kośa* (ibid.: 3) identifies *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* (analytical cessation)—a synonym for *nirvāṇa*—as an *asaṃskṛta-dharma*, an unconditioned phenomenon; on the synonymy of *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* and *nirvāṇa*, see La Vallée Poussin 1930b: 10-11. Also note that MSABh ad 11.37 identifies the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*)—or "space, etc."—as one of the five standard categories of phenomena.

dharma, and would thus have difficulty characterizing its doctrines as properly Buddhist, at least in terms of these criteria. So how can the MSA/Bh at one and the same time affirm non-dualism and the possibility of attaining the unconditioned?

One way to understand the MSA/Bh's response to this problem is to consider its concept of *apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa* as a reinterpretation of the term "unconditioned." First, however, we should review the text's characterization of the Hīnayāna notion of the unconditioned. From the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna views the unconditioned in direct opposition to the conditioned: the two form a mutually exclusive pair; the conditioned—characterized by suffering—is to be left behind for the unconditioned—characterized by peace. On the MSA/Bh's reading, the Hīnayāna attainment of the unconditioned culminates in the attainment of *nirupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, and the text characterizes this type of nirvāṇa as a form of cessation. Thus, on the MSA/Bh's reading, the Hīnayāna notion of the unconditioned implies the complete cessation or termination of any form of existence.

The MSA/Bh, however, does not interpret the unconditioned in this way. While the text does understand the unconditioned as that which is not created by a concurrence of causes and conditions, it does not take the unconditioned to mean a complete cessation of all forms of existence. In the MSA/Bh, the unconditioned is not an absolute cessation in direct opposition to conditioned existence. Instead the unconditioned is interpreted more conventionally to imply a form of existence which is unrestricted in activity (rather than non-existent). The commentary to 9.14 states:

saṃsāra-nirvāṇāpratiṣṭhitatvāt saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtatvenādvayā vṛttiḥ/

> The activity [of buddhas] is non-dual with respect to both conditioned and unconditioned because it does not abide in either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.

According to this statement, the activity of buddhas does not abide in saṃsāra—the conditioned realm—nor does it abide in nirvāṇa—the unconditioned realm. Thus the activity of buddhas is understood to be non-dual with respect to the conditioned and unconditioned; that is to say, the activity of buddhas is understood to be neither conditioned nor unconditioned. While it is reasonable that the MSA/Bh would claim that the activity of buddhas is not conditioned, it is not immediately apparent why the text would claim that this activity is not *unconditioned*. While the text does not directly address this issue, one plausible reading would be to consider the activity of buddhas as not *entirely* unconditioned in the sense that it *participates* in the conditioned realm, or manifests spontaneously in the conditioned realm, without thereby being brought into being by a concurrence of causes and conditions. Perhaps the MSA/Bh interprets the activity of buddhas as unconditioned not in the absolute sense of having no relation whatsoever to the conditioned realm, but in the more restricted sense of being spontaneous, uncaused, and unrestricted in operation.[16]

This understanding of the term unconditioned may be seen at other locations in the text. At 18.67, the verse-text and commentary state that the three final bodhisattva-stages (the eighth through the tenth stages) are regarded as unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), because conditioned phenomena no longer operate in them.[17] It is significant to note that,

16. At MSA 9.18-19 the activity of buddhas is described as *vinābhogam*, "spontaneous," or "effortless."

17. After referring to the seventh bodhisattva-stage, MSABh ad 18.67cd-68 states: asaṃskṛtam anyad bhūmi-trayam anabhisaṃskāra-vāhitvāt/ saṃskāro hi saṃskṛtaṃ tad atra nāstīty asaṃskṛtam/.

as stated earlier, the text indicates that non-abiding nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*) is attained on the last three bodhisattva-stages. Thus here the text correlates the notion of the unconditioned with non-abiding nirvāṇa. Furthermore, at MSABh ad 19.61-62, the last three bodhisattva-stages are explicitly linked to non-abiding nirvāṇa, and are characterized by the activity of purifying a buddha-field.[18] So again, we see that the unconditioned (here, non-abiding nirvāṇa) is related to a state of activity.

Again, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna creates too strong a duality between the conditioned and the unconditioned: for the Hīnayāna, the two are absolutely distinct. As a result of this strong duality, according to the MSA/Bh, in the Hīnayāna existence is characterized as conditioned, and the conditioned is characterized by suffering; thus in order to terminate suffering, the Hīnayāna directs itself towards attaining the unconditioned, which, on the MSA/Bh's reading, thereby implies a cessation of existence. The Mahāyāna interpretation of the unconditioned, on the other hand, does not affirm an ultimate duality between the conditioned and the unconditioned; thus the unconditioned is not viewed as absolute cessation. Rather it comes to be interpreted more conventionally to imply a state that is unrestricted in activity. Thus the MSA/Bh's notion of non-abiding nirvāṇa may be viewed as a reinterpretation of the notion of the unconditioned: non-abiding nirvāṇa is not an absolute; rather it is interpreted as a state of unceasing activity directed towards bringing sentient beings to awakening.

18. MSA/Bh ad 19.61-62: kṣetra-pariśodhanam apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇaṃ cāvinivartanīyāyāṃ bhūmau trividhāyāṃ/.

Chapter 6
Bodhi (awakening)

Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, while the attainment of nirvāṇa in its reinterpreted form of non-abiding nirvāṇa plays an important role in the text, it is not the central soteriological goal identified by the MSA/Bh. Rather, the text emphases the attainment of *bodhi*, or awakening: ultimately it is the complete awakening of a buddha that the text affirms as the highest soteriological goal possible. But just as the text posits that there are various forms of nirvāṇa, so too does it posit that there are various forms of awakening. While śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas strive for awakening by means of the Hīnayāna, bodhisattvas strive for the complete awakening of a buddha by means of the Mahāyāna. One interesting difference between the MSA/Bh's characterization of the paths of the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna is the order in which awakening and nirvāṇa are attained. According to the text, on the Hīnayāna path (the path of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas) the attainment of awakening precedes the attainment of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning; on the Mahāyāna path, however, the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa precedes the attainment of perfect awakening and buddhahood. Thus, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna is directed towards parinirvāṇa as the ultimate soteriological goal, while the Mahāyāna is directed towards perfect awakening as the ultimate soteriological goal.

Three forms of awakening may be identified in the MSA/Bh: the awakening of a śrāvaka, the awakening of a pratyekabuddha, and the complete awakening of a buddha.

While little is said about the awakenings of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas—in fact these two forms of awakening are not always clearly distinguished in the text—, much more space is devoted to exploring the topic of the awakening of a buddha. In this chapter I will examine how awakening is discussed in the MSA/Bh. I will identify what the text says about the attainment and definition of awakening, and I will examine how the term *bodhi* is related to other important terms in the text.

Exegesis of *bodhi*

As we saw in the chapter on gotra, the MSA/Bh identifies three forms of awakening: inferior, middling, and superior. And these three forms of awakening may be aligned with the three gotras and the three vehicles (śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva). This alignment of the three distinct forms of awakening with the three vehicles is further corroborated at 19.46, where the MSA states that the three vehicles differ according to five things, the fifth of which is their attainment (*samudāgama*), which the commentary specifies as awakening. But as we shall see, the text does little to distinguish the awakening of a śrāvaka from the awakening of a pratyekabuddha other than to label the former inferior and the latter middling.

In the Mahāyāna the practices for the attainment of awakening have been typically identified as acquiring the provisions of merit and knowledge (*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*), developing the aids to awakening (*bodhipakṣa*, lit., "wings of awakening"), and cultivating the perfections (*pāramitā*). While the text devotes only four verses to the topic of the provisions of merit and knowledge (18.38-41), the development of the aids to

awakening and the cultivation of the perfections are both treated at length in the text, with a whole chapter devoted to each. Furthermore, the chapter on the aids to awakening (MSA, Chapter 18) contains the greatest number of verses (104 vv.), while the chapter on the perfections (MSA, Chapter 16) places fourth (79 vv.).

Throughout the text the perfections are normally understood in terms of the standard six: giving, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom (*dāna*, *śīla*, *kṣānti*, *vīrya*, *dhyāna*, *prajñā*). However there are at least two locations where the text mentions the ten perfections (11.73 and ad 20-21.29-30), although a specific list of the ten is not offered at either location. The other principal form of practice relating to awakening—the thirty-seven aids to awakening—may be listed as follows:[1]

four applications of awareness (*smṛtyupasthāna*): of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena;
four right exertions (*samyak-prahāṇa*): to prevent further sinful states, to eliminate existing sinful states, to produce further good states, and to maintain existing good states;
four bases of supernatural powers (*ṛddhi-pāda*): of zeal, energy, mind, and reflection;
five faculties (*indriya*): of faith, energy, memory, concentration, and wisdom;
five powers (*bala*): (these correspond to the five faculties)
seven limbs of awakening (*bodhyaṅga*): memory, comprehension of dharma, energy, joy, serenity, concentration, and equanimity;
noble eightfold path.

The interesting thing to note about the text's treatment of the perfections and the aids to awakening is that the discussion is not primarily focused on how one should go about cultivating the perfections or developing the aids to awakening. Rather, the text primarily concerns itself with defining them, discussing how they relate to one another,

1. This list is derived from MSA/Bh 18.42-65. For a discussion of the thirty-seven *bodhi-pakkhiyā dhammā* in Pāli literature, see Gethin 1992.

and understanding their various aspects; for example, what they are based on, when they are achieved, and what effects they lead to. These primary concerns state something significant about the text: the MSA/Bh should not be principally understood as a text providing detailed presentations of methods of practice. Rather, the text is best understood as concerned with reflections on terms and concepts central to a certain conceptualization of Mahāyāna practice: presupposing extended presentations of the practice of the Mahāyāna, the MSA/Bh sets out to provide justifications for that practice, its efficacy, and its superiority to other forms of practice (e.g., as found in the Hīnayāna).

At 20-21.42, the verse-text states that four courses of conduct (*caryā*) have been taught in order to train beings in the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. The commentary specifies the four courses of conduct and their relation to the two vehicles: the course of conduct of the perfections is for those who have confidence in the Mahāyāna; the course of conduct of the aids to awakening is for those who have confidence in the Hīnayāna; and the courses of conduct of the higher knowledges and of maturation are for those who have confidence in either vehicle. From this verse and its commentary we can see that the practice of the perfections is the special domain of bodhisattvas. Furthermore, the text here also seems to indicate that the aids to awakening are the concern only of practitioners of the Hīnayāna. This last conclusion, however, is at odds with numerous statements in MSA, Chapter 18 (on the aids to awakening). For example, in discussing the four applications of awareness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), the commentary to 18.43-44 states that there are fourteen aspects of their cultivation which are special to bodhisattvas.[2] So

2. MSABh ad 18.43-44: ity ebhiś caturdaśabhir ākārair bodhisattvānāṃ smṛtyupasthāna-bhāvanā viśeṣyate/.

while the aids to awakening may be the primary means to awakening for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, these practices are not the exclusive domain of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas.

Another important concept relevant to the attainment of awakening in the MSA/Bh is that of mental application (*manas-/manasi-kāra*). In his study of *āśraya-parivṛtti/-parāvṛtti*, Davidson remarks, "So important, in fact, is mental application to the Yogācāra tradition at large, that several texts maintain that only two elements are absolutely necessary for realization: hearing the teaching from another (*parato ghoṣa*) and mental application" (1985: 183). This statement is quite interesting because, while Davidson himself makes reference to the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha*, support for his remark may also be found in the MSA itself. The first half of 1.16 states:

> śrutaṃ niśrityādau prabhavati manas-kāra iha yo
> manas-kārāj jñānaṃ prabhavati ca tattvārtha-viṣayaṃ/
>
> Mental application arises initially through relying on what has been heard. And an awareness whose object is the meaning of reality arises from mental application.

If we equate the awareness whose object is the meaning of reality with awakening (an equation we can justify in our further analysis of the term of *bodhi*), we can see that—as Davidson remarked—basically only two elements are absolutely necessary for realization: hearing the teaching and mental application.

However, mental application should not be understood as one particular practice; rather it is a category under which a variety of practices are gathered. A number of lists of mental applications may be found in the MSA/Bh, and the text is clear in stating that the mental applications of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are different from the mental

applications of bodhisattvas.[3] Here I will provide one list of the mental applications of bodhisattvas in order to offer some sense of what the category of mental application refers to in the text, and to show how it relates to the attainment of awakening. This particular list—found at 11.8-12 and its commentary—presents eighteen forms of mental application:[4]

(1) definite according to realm (*dhātu-niyata*): definite according to gotra;
[the topic of MSA, Chapter 3];
(2) performing its task (*kṛtyakara*): accumulating the provisions;
[an indirect reference to the path of accumulation (*saṃbhāra-mārga*), which is discussed in MSA, Chapter 14];
(3) analyzed in terms of basis (*āśraya-vibhakta*): the basis has obstacles when one is a householder, and does not have obstacles when one has "gone forth" (*pravrajitā*) as a monk;
[here the monastic form of life is valorized];
(4) established in the inclination (*adhimukti-niveśaka*);
[inclination is the topic of MSA, Chapter 10];
(5) giving rise to zeal (*cchanda-janaka*);
[zeal is one of the thirty-seven aids to awakening (*bodhipakṣa*) discussed in MSA, Chapter 18];
(6) based on concentration (*samādhi-saṃniśrita*);
[concentration is the last element of the noble eightfold path, which again is an element of the thirty-seven aids to awakening];
(7) associated with knowledge (*jñāna-saṃprayukta*): refers to the standard three aspects of practice: hearing, reflecting, and cultivating;
[these three were mentioned in my discussion of *vimukti*];
(8) [having a] basis that is unified (*saṃbhinnālambana*):[5] such as the genres of sūtra, summary (*uddāna*), verse (*gāthā*), etc.;
[this seems to refer to the form of the teaching];
(9) [having a] basis that is differentiated (*vibhinnālambana*): when the basis is words, statements, syllables, the absence of self in persons, the absence of self in phenomena, the phenomena of form, and the phenomena that are other than form;

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3. See, e.g., MSABh intro ad 13.14-15 and ad 18.46.

4. The Sanskrit terms offered in the list are drawn from the commentary. The comments in brackets are my own.

5. On the terms *saṃbhinna* and *vibhinna* see Griffiths et al. 1989: 93, note 42, and 112, note 73.

[this seems to refer to aspects of the content of the teaching];

(10) definite according to thorough knowledge (*parijñā-niyata*): the object of thorough knowledge is suffering; the meaning of thorough knowledge is impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and absence of self; thorough knowledge itself is the path; its fruit is liberation; and its understanding is the knowledge of liberation;
[this also seems to refer to aspects of the content of the teaching];

(11) occupied with the aspects of cultivation (*bhāvanākāra-praviṣṭa*): subdivided in two ways:
(a) cultivation of four aspects: the aspects of the absence of self in persons and phenomena, the aspect of vision, and the aspect of knowledge;
[this seems to refer to aspects of the practice of the teaching];
(b) cultivation of thirty-seven aspects;
[these are given in terms of the thirty-seven aids to awakening];

(12) having the nature of the two paths: the commentary states that there is no description of the nature of the path of the cultivation of calmness and insight (*śamatha-vipaśyanā-bhāvanā-mārga-svabhāva*), which ostensibly means that these paths are without inherent nature;
[the path of cultivation is discussed in MSA, Chapter 14];

(13) mental application of benefit (*anuśaṃsa-manas-kāra*): removing the latent difficulties and the signs of views;

(14) receiving (*pratīcchaka*): receiving the advice of buddhas and bodhisattvas;

(15) mental application of practicing (*prāyogika-manas-kāra*): practicing in various spheres of concentration;

(16) mental application of authority (*vaśavarti-manas-kāra*): the purification of the afflictive obstructions;[6]

(17) mental application which is limited (*parītta-manas-kāra*): the purification of the cognitive and afflictive obstructions;

(18) mental application which is expansive (*vipula-manas-kāra*): the cultivation of virtues;
[this is the topic of MSA, Chapter 19];

It can be seen from this list that the category of mental application encompasses a number of practices that are central to various schemes for the attainment of Buddhist soteriological goals: possessing a gotra, practicing the five paths, developing the thirty-seven aids to awakening, removing latent difficulties and obstructions, etc. I suggest that

6. Note that while MSABh ad 11.8-12 states that the mental application of authority—(16) on this list—is threefold. I have separated the three subdivisions and have placed the first with (16), the second with (17), and the third with (18). This is almost certainly justified, however, since the commentary makes no mention of (17) and (18) at all, even though it specifically states that there are eighteen mental applications.

this list may be divided in the following way: (1)-(7)—preparation for the teaching; (8)-(10)—form and content of the teaching; (11)-(15)—practice of the teaching; and (16)-(18)—results of the teaching. This division is a rough and ready one, however, and should only be thought of as a general outline. The list seems to be a compilation that is not necessarily systematic.

The primary reason I offer this list is to show how the category of mental application directly relates to other elements of practice that lead to awakening. The most important elements to note in this list are (1), which associates mental application with gotra—a necessary preliminary to attaining any Buddhist soteriological goal in the MSA/Bh; (2) which associates mental application with the provisions of merit and knowledge—another important preliminary requirement for attaining awakening; and (5), (6), and (11b), which associate mental application with the thirty-seven aids to awakening. In fact this last one—(11b), occupied with the aspects of cultivation—may be understood as a mental application that is directed towards developing the aids to awakening. So here the development of the aids to awakening is closely related to—indeed even subsumed under—the category of mental application.

At other locations in the text mental application is closely associated with the cultivation of the perfections. The commentary introducing 11.61-73 states that these verses indicate the mental applications associated with the perfections for the sake of bringing them to completion.[7] Also at 16.16 the verse-text lists five things upon which

7. MSABh intro ad 11.61: pāramitā-paripūraṇārtham ye pāramitā-pratisaṃyuktā evaṃ manasi-kārā dhātu-puṣṭaye bhavanti ta etābhir gāthābhir deśitāḥ/.

the cultivation of the perfections is based, and one of these five is mental application.[8] So from these two statements we can see that the text posits a close relation between cultivation of the perfections and mental application, even going so far as to state that the former is (at least partially) based on the latter. Considering this evidence in conjunction with the evidence from 11.8-12—which demonstrates that the development of the aids to awakening is directly associated with mental application—allows us to conclude that mental application plays a central role in the MSA/Bh's understanding of how awakening is to be attained.

As is standard in many Mahāyāna texts, the MSA/Bh divides the various attainments of bodhisattvas into ten stages. These attainments are brought to their culmination in the eleventh stage, that of buddhahood. While the text (somewhat ambiguously) identifies non-abiding nirvāṇa as an eighth-to-tenth-stage attainment, it is quite clear in specifying perfect awakening as an eleventh-stage attainment. At 19.3, in discussing the four fruits of bodhisattvas (birth in the family of Tathāgatas, obtaining a prophecy, consecration, and awakening), the commentary states that the fourth fruit is attained on the stage of buddhahood.[9] And in the verses which list the ten topics of the Mahāyāna (19.61-62), the commentary again states that awakening is attained on the stage of buddhahood.[10] So while the attainment of non-abiding nirvāṇa is certainly important to the text, it is less important than the attainment of perfect awakening, since

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8. MSA 16.16: bhāvanopadhim āśritya manas-kāraṃ tathāśayaṃ/ upāyaṃ ca vibhutvaṃ ca sarvāsām eva kathyate//.

9. MSABh ad 19.3: buddha-bhūmau caturtham aśaikṣam atra phalaṃ/.

10. MSABh ad 19.61-62: śreṣṭhā bodhir buddha-bhūmau/.

the former is attained on a high-level bodhisattva stage, while the latter is only attained at the stage of buddhahood itself.

As in the case of nirvāṇa, the attainment of awakening is also understood as a particular mode of manifestation through which buddhas may appear in order to mature sentient beings.[11] The ability to manifest oneself as attaining awakening comes about when one is already a fully-awakened buddha. Thus having become fully-awakened, buddhas gain the ability to represent this attainment to other sentient beings in order to motivate them spiritually.

From the topic of the attainment of awakening, I will now turn to discussing how awakening is understood in the MSA/Bh. As an introduction to this discussion we may note that in its apology for the Mahāyāna, MSABh ad 1.11 states that the Mahāyāna does not contradict reality (*dharmatā*), since reality leads to the attainment of great awakening (*mahābodhi*). This statement is reasserted in the commentary to 17.5, where the text states that great awakening is due to thusness (*tathātva*)—thusness being another synonym for reality. From these two statements we can see that the text sees perfect awakening as intimately connected with reality itself.

This close link between reality and perfect awakening may also be seen in the realization of the principle of nothing-but-conceptual-construction, the recognition that what has formerly been taken for reality is nothing more than a conceptually imagined matrix of concepts. At 9.81 the verse-text and commentary state:

paśyatāṃ kalpanā-mātraṃ sarvam etad yathoditaṃ/

11. See, e.g., MSA/Bh ad 9.14, 9.51, 9.64, ad 14.42-46, ad 19.60, ad 19.62, and ad 19.79.

akalpa-bodhisattvānāṃ prāptā bodhir nirūpyate//

kalpanā-mātraṃ tv etat sarvam iti paśyatāṃ tasyāpi kalpanā-mātrasyāvikalpanād akalpa-bodhisattvānām anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti-lābhāvasthāyām arthataḥ prāptaiva bodhir ity ucyate/

When bodhisattvas who do not conceptualize see all this as nothing but conceptual construction, just as it has been described, they are said to have obtained awakening.

When bodhisattvas who do not conceptualize see that all this is nothing but conceptual construction, due to the non-discrimination of even 'nothing-but-conceptual-construction,' when there truly is the attainment of receptivity to the fact that phenomena are not arisen, they are said to have obtained awakening.

Here it is said that awakening is obtained when one recognizes everything as nothing but conceptual construction. We can also see that awakening involves the non-discrimination of even the principle of nothing but conceptual construction—a claim that parallels the text's remarks that having perceived the principles of representation-only and mind-only, one must arrive at the state of not even perceiving those principles.[12] Thus in the Mahāyāna, awakening entails an understanding of the whole of reality, the realization that reality is not to be conceptually constructed, and the further realization that even the notion "conceptually constructed" is itself conceptually constructed.

In the awakening of the Hīnayāna, however, according to the MSA, conceptual discriminations still function. Having stated that the abodes of hell are not an obstacle for those who have an awakening that is pure and expansive, the second half of 13.15 continues:

svahita-parama-śītas tv anya-yāne vikalpaḥ
parama-sukha-vihāre 'py antarāyaṃ karoti//

12. See MSA 11.47 and MSABh ad 6.6-9, which were discussed in detail in Chapter 4, on *vimukti*.

> But in the other vehicle, conceptual discrimination—which is apathetic and whose chief object is one's own benefit—also creates an obstacle to the abode of supreme happiness.

Unlike the awakening of bodhisattvas, the awakening of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, then, entails the continuation of some form of conceptual construction. And since reality is understood as inherently non-dual and non-conceptually-constructed, the awakening of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is not intimately linked with reality, in the way that it is in the case of the awakening of a buddha—wherein conceptual constructions no longer function.

Perhaps the fullest treatment of the concept of awakening occurs in the text at 19.48-55, which the commentary introduces as verses on the analysis of thorough knowledge in accordance with reality as it really is (*yathā-bhūta-parijñāna-vibhāga*).[13] Here I will discuss the first four of those verses.[14] 19.48 states:

> sarvasyānupalambhāc ca bhūta-jñānaṃ caturvidhaṃ/
> sarvārtha-siddhyai dhīrāṇāṃ sarva-bhūmiṣu jāyate//
>
> The fourfold knowledge of reality, which is due to the non-perception of everything, is acquired by those who are resolved, in order to accomplish all the aims in all the stages.

Here the commentary specifies that the fourfold knowledge of reality refers to the investigation of words (*nāma*), the investigation of objects (*vastu*), the investigation of designations for inherent nature (*svabhāva-prajñapti*), and the investigation of designations for particularity (*viśeṣa-prajñapti*). And the thorough knowledge of

13. Following Lévi (1911: 276) I am reading *-parijñāna-vibhāge* for *-parihāra-vibhāge*.

14. MSA 19.54 has already been discussed in Chapter 4.

everything is due to the non-perception of these four. So thorough knowledge does not perceive the characteristics of words, objects, etc. This is in accordance with the text's claims, discussed above, that perfect awakening is attained when there is the absence of all forms of conceptual construction.

The second verse (19.49) states:

> pratiṣṭhābhoga-bījaṃ hi nimittaṃ bandhanasya hi/
> sāśrayāś citta-caittās tu badhyante 'tra sabījakāḥ//
>
> The sign[15] of bondage is the dwelling, experience, and the seed. Mind and mental factors, along with their bases and their seeds, are bound.

The commentary identifies the sign that is the dwelling as the inanimate world (*bhājana-loka*), the sign that comprises experience as the five sense-objects, and the sign that is the seed as the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). The commentary also states that the store-consciousness is the seed of both dwelling and experience, and that it is the seed of the mind and mental factors. We may represent this verse and its commentary through the following chart:

<u>mind and mental factors</u>
whose seed is the store-consciousness
are bound to:

<u>the threefold sign</u>

sign of dwelling =	the inanimate world, whose seed is the store-consciousness
sign of experience =	the five sense-objects, whose seed is the store-consciousness
seed =	the store-consciousness itself

15. I translate the term *nimitta* as "sign"; other possible translations of this term are "mark, appearance, characteristic." For an extended discussion of the term, see Edgerton 1970, vol. 2: 297-298.

Viewing the verse and commentary in this way allows us to see the importance of the store-consciousness for the commentary.[16] While it is the mind and mental factors which are bound to the threefold sign, when viewed in terms of their basis or source of origin, it is actually the store-consciousness that is bound to itself. It is the store-consciousness that is at the root of both the subjective aspect of experience (mind and mental factors) and the experience of objects (the threefold sign). This state of affairs obtains before the attainment of awakening.

Continuing with the following verse, 19.50 and its commentary state:

> purataḥ sthāpitaṃ yac ca nimittaṃ yat sthitaṃ svayaṃ/
> sarvaṃ vibhāvayan dhīmān labhate bodhim uttamāṃ//
>
> . . . akalpanā tad-upāyo nimitta-pratipakṣaḥ/ tac cobhayaṃ kramād bhavati/ pūrvaṃ hi sthāpitasya paścāt svayaṃ sthitasya/ tatra catur-viparyāsānugataṃ pudgala-nimittaṃ vibhāvayan yogī śrāvaka-bodhiṃ pratyeka-bodhiṃ vā labhate/ sarva-dharma-nimittaṃ vibhāvayan mahābodhiṃ/
>
> Eliminating everything—the sign that was established before and that which remains of its own accord—the wise one obtains the highest awakening.
>
> The means to that [elimination]—which is the antidote to the sign—is the absence of conceptual construction. And both of them come about in due order: first [there is the absence of conceptual construction] of that which has been established, then [there is the absence of conceptual construction] of that which remains of its own accord. There the yogin, eliminating the sign of the person—which is accompanied by the four delusions—attains the awakening of a śrāvaka or the awakening of a pratyekabuddha. Eliminating the sign of all phenomena, one attains great awakening.

In this verse and its commentary the distinction between Hīnayāna awakening and Mahāyāna awakening is made. Hīnayāna awakening—the awakening of a śrāvaka or a

16. Recall that the term *ālaya-vijñāna* (store-consciousness) is only used by the MSABh; it is not used in the verse-text.

pratyekabuddha—entails the elimination of the sign of the person, which may be equated with the realization of the absence of self in persons. Mahāyāna awakening, however, entails the elimination of the sign of all phenomena, the realization of the absence of self in both persons and phenomena. Although the commentary does not make the connection explicit, we may infer that "the sign that was established before" is the sign of persons, and "the sign that remains of its own accord" is the sign of phenomena. If this equation is correct, then one must first eliminate the sign of the person before one can arrive at the elimination of the sign of phenomena, since the commentary states that their respective eliminations come about in due order. And the means to the elimination of the view that there is a self in persons and phenomena is the absence of conceptual construction. Thus when conceptual construction with regard to persons is brought to an end, Hīnayāna awakening is attained; and when conceptual construction with regard to all phenomena whatsoever is brought to an end, Mahāyāna awakening is attained.

The commentary to the following verse introduces the three natures into the discussion. 19.51 and its commentary state:

> tathatālambanaṃ jñānaṃ dvaya-grāha-vivarjitaṃ/
> dauṣṭhulya-kāya-pratyakṣaṃ tat-kṣaye dhīmatāṃ mataṃ//
>
> etena yathā-svabhāva-traya-parijñānāt paratantra-svabhāva-kṣayāya saṃvartate/ tat-paridīpitaṃ/ tathatālambanatvena pariniṣpannaṃ svabhāvaṃ parijñāya/ dvaya-grāha-vivarjitatvena kalpitaṃ/ dauṣṭhulya-kāya-pratyakṣatvena paratantraṃ/ tasyaiva kṣayāya saṃvartate dauṣṭhulya-kāyasyālaya-vijñānasya tat-kṣayārthaṃ tat-kṣaye/
>
> Awareness that has thusness as its basis is free of grasping after duality and it perceives the multitude of latent difficulties. In the destruction of that, there is the knowledge of the wise.

> In this [verse] it is explained that the thorough knowledge of the three natures as they are is conducive to the end of the dependent nature. The perfected nature is known through the basis of thusness; the imagined [nature], through freedom from grasping after duality; and the dependent [nature], through the perception of the multitude of latent difficulties. Thus [the knowledge of the three natures] is conducive to the destruction of [the multitude of latent difficulties]; [in the verse, the phrase] 'in the destruction of that' means the destruction of the multitude of latent difficulties, which is the store-consciousness.

In this verse and its commentary awareness is outlined in terms of the three natures. We may represent this awareness in the following way:

<u>awareness</u>	
which has thusness as its basis =	thorough knowledge of the perfected nature
which is free from grasping after duality =	thorough knowledge of the imagined nature
which perceives the store-consciousness =	thorough knowledge of the dependent nature

In 19.49 and its commentary we saw that mind and mental factors are bound to the three signs or marks, which—when viewed in terms of their basis—means that the store-consciousness is bound to itself. Here in 19.51 we see that the destruction of the store-consciousness is brought about when there is thorough knowledge of the three natures.

Since we may assume that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas must also achieve the destruction of the store-consciousness (it is, after all, the seed of bondage), are we to infer that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas obtain knowledge of the three natures? A number of statements in the text work against drawing this inference. At 13.1 the verse-text states that, having understood the absence of self in persons and phenomena, one avoids

duality, falsity, and identity by means of three things.[17] The commentary specifies these three as the three concentrations: the emptiness of the imagined nature, the wishlessness of the dependent nature, and the signlessness of the perfected nature. So here the realization of the absence of self in persons and phenomena (a realization only attained in the Mahāyāna) is linked to the three natures, which implies that the three natures themselves are a Mahāyāna realization. Furthermore, the commentary to 19.77 identifies the understanding (*bodha*) of the three natures as a special understanding of bodhisattvas.[18] This would seem to indicate, then, that the Hīnayāna does not lead to knowledge of the three natures.

Having discussed how awakening is understood in the MSA/Bh, I will now examine how it is related to other terms in the text. In the chapter on nirvāṇa, we have already discussed 9.70 and its commentary, which links the equality-awareness with non-abiding nirvāṇa and the attainment of awakening. But as I concluded there, the specific connection between these terms is not precisely made in the text. I will, however, discuss the equality-awareness in further detail in the next chapter on buddhahood.

The attainment of awakening is, however, more closely linked with other terms in the text. For example, 20-21.58 and its commentary state:

> tribhiḥ kāyair mahābodhiṃ sarvākārām upāgata/
> sarvatra sarva-sattvānāṃ kāṅkṣā-chid namo 'stu te//

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17. MSA 13.1: dvedhā nairātmyam ājñāya dhīmān pudgala-dharmayoḥ/ dvaya-mithyātva-samyaktvaṃ vivarjyeta trayeṇa hi//.

18. MSABh ad 19.77: atra punaḥ pañcavidhaṃ bodha-viśeṣaṃ darśayati/ . . . parikalpitādi-svabhāva-traya-bodhāc ca/.

> anena tribhiś ca kāyaiḥ sarvākāra-bodhy-upagamatvāt sarva-jñeya-sarvākāra-jñānāc ca sarvākāra-jñatā bhagavataḥ paridīpitā/
>
> By means of the three bodies, you have arrived at great awakening which has all modes of appearance; you always cut off the desires of all sentient beings: homage to you!
>
> This explains that the blessed one's awareness of all modes of appearance is by means of the three bodies and is due to an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance as a result of the attainment of an awakening which has all modes of appearance.

Here the attainment of awakening is closely linked to the activity of the three buddha-bodies, a topic that I will discuss in the next chapter. But we can also see that the attainment of great awakening is equated with an awareness of all modes of appearance. Otherwise stated, the attainment of the awakening of a buddha is equivalent to omniscience.[19] This link between awakening and omniscience may also be seen in the commentary to 20-21.9-14, which states:

> ekādaśyāṃ buddha-bhūmau bodhi-viśuddhatā lakṣaṇāṃ sarva-jñeyāvaraṇa-prahāṇāt/
>
> On the eleventh [stage], the stage of buddhahood, there is the characteristic of the purification of awakening due to the removal of all cognitive obstructions.

Here awakening is said to be purified when there is the removal of all cognitive obstructions, that is, when there is the removal of those obstructions that prevent one from being aware of all cognitive objects. When these obstructions are removed, there is the attainment of buddhahood and omniscience, since at that time all objects of knowledge will enter into awareness unobstructed. So again we see that the awakening of a buddha is equated with omniscience.

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19. For an extended discussion of omniscience in the MSA, see Griffiths 1990a.

Comments on *bodhi*

As I remarked in the introduction, although the MSA/Bh distinguishes three types of awakening, the text does little more to distinguish the awakening of a śrāvaka from the awakening of a pratyekabuddha besides stating that the former is inferior and the latter middling. The text states that the awakening of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas is attained when there is the realization of the absence of self in persons, which is described as coming about when conceptual construction is no longer applied to the category of persons. However, the text does not posit that conceptual constructions cease entirely in the awakening of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. In fact, as we saw above, at 13.15 the verse-text states that conceptual discriminations still operate for śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, albeit not at the level of constructing reified egos of persons. Indeed, the text states that śrāvakas posit a distinction between the presence of a sign and the absence of a sign,[20] which ostensibly means that at the level of phenomena, śrāvakas distinguish between those that are taken to be real and those that are taken to be unreal. But from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, such a distinction is not grounded in reality, since reality is characterized as non-dual and completely free of conceptualization. So, according to the MSA/Bh, while Hīnayāna awakening brings one to a partial understanding of reality (since it does entail the cessation of the conceptual construction of persons), it does not arrive at a complete understanding of reality (since it does not entail the cessation of the conceptual construction of all phenomena).

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20. MSABh ad 19.52: te [śrāvakā] hi nimittānimittayor nānātvaṃ paśyantu/.

The MSA/Bh's description of Mahāyāna awakening, on the other hand, implies that such an awakening would involve a complete understanding of reality. Mahāyāna awakening is described as the result of the complete absence of conceptual construction. It is said to come about when neither persons nor phenomena are taken to have any sort of inherent nature or essence whatsoever. It is said to entail knowledge of the three natures, the dependent, the imagined, and the perfected. And it said to issue in—or it is described as equivalent to—the attainment of omniscience, an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. And since, as we shall see in the next chapter, the MSA/Bh equates omniscience with buddhahood, the text does not ultimately view the awakening of a buddha as distinct from buddhahood itself.

Chapter 7
Buddhatva (buddhahood)

Introduction

From the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the most significant characteristic of the Mahāyāna—what clearly separates it from the "lesser vehicles" of the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna—is that it leads to the attainment of buddhahood. So in order to understand the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna in this text, it is important to understand what is meant by this attainment. In this final chapter on soteriological terms in the MSA/Bh, I will focus on the highest soteriological goal posited by the Mahāyāna: the attainment of buddhahood (*buddhatva* or *buddhatā*).

In the previous chapter on *bodhi*, I stated that the text makes no clear distinction between the awakening of a buddha and buddhahood itself. Nevertheless, I have chosen to treat *bodhi* and *buddhatva* as distinct for the purposes of this study. There are two reasons for this. First, since the MSA/Bh posits that there are forms of awakening other than that of a buddha, it was important for me to discuss the various forms of awakening together, in order to more clearly identify the distinctions between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna forms. And second, while the awakening of a buddha and buddhahood are not ontologically distinguished, the text does, nevertheless, discuss the two in relation to different terms and concepts. Therefore, it is useful to treat the two separately.

The topic of buddhahood is addressed in a number of ways in the MSA/Bh. In fact one of the longest chapters in the text—MSA, Chapter 9—is specifically devoted to

the interpretation of buddhahood.[1] The MSA/Bh primarily interprets buddhahood in terms of the following: the characteristics of a buddha, the six categories that describe the purity of the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu-viśuddhi*), the three embodiments of buddhahood, the four awarenesses of a buddha, and omniscience. Here I will discuss each of these approaches to buddhahood in an attempt to understand the MSA/Bh's perspective on what it posits as the most exalted soteriological attainment.

Exegesis of *buddhatva*

One way in which the concept of buddhahood is understood in Indian Buddhist texts is through analyzing buddhahood into its constituent components. This tendency is noticeable for example in an abhidharma text such as the *Abhidharmakośa*. In this text, a buddha is understood to be comprised of a number of undefiled qualities, some of which are held in common with other arhats, and others of which are exclusive to buddhas. The list of the eighteen qualities exclusive to buddhas (*āveṇika-buddha-dharmas*) given in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is as follows: the ten powers, the four confidences, the three applications of mindfulness, and great compassion.[2] The MSABh makes reference to this

1. While the MSABh states that this chapter is on *bodhi*, it is clear from the contents of the chapter that its focus is the awakening of a buddha—and, hence, buddhahood.

2. See *Abhidharmakośa* and *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* ad 7.27 (Sanskrit ed., Pradhan 1967: 411).

list,[3] stating that these qualities are brought to completion through a non-conceptually-constructing awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*).[4]

The MSA/Bh also, however, contains a more extended list of the qualities that characterize a buddha. This extended list is found in the last chapter of the text (at 20-21.43-59), in the section that offers homage to the buddha.[5] As these verses have already been discussed at length elsewhere, I will offer a simplified summary here.[6] A buddha is said to possess the following characteristics:

(1) four immeasurable states;
(2) eight liberations, eight spheres of mastery, and ten spheres of totality;
(3) noncontentiousness;
(4) an awareness that is the result of past vows;
(5) four specific forms of understanding: of doctrine, meaning, grammar, and eloquence;
(6) six supernatural powers;
(7) thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of a great person;
(8) four kinds of purification: of basis, mental objects, mind, and wisdom;
(9) ten powers;
(10) four confidences;
(11) three forms of guardlessness: of body, speech, and mind;
(12) three applications of mindfulness;
(13) destruction of all tendencies (*vāsanā*);[7]
(14) absence of confusion;
(15) great compassion;
(16) eighteen qualities exclusive to buddhas;
(17) omniscience;

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3. MSABh ad 18.54: dharma-prāptir bala-vaiśāradyāveṇika-buddha-dharmāṇāṃ prāptiḥ/.

4. See MSABh ad 18.69.

5. As stated in Chapter 2, this section of verses is found both in the *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* and as an independent text in the Tibetan canon.

6. For a more complete discussion see Griffiths 1994: 66-75. My list is derived from the one provided by Griffiths.

7. The *vāsanā* are discussed at length by Lamotte 1974.

(18) completion of the six perfections.

As Griffiths notes in his discussion, this list contains a number of elements which overlap with one another. It should also be noted that at item (16) the MSA/Bh offers a list of the qualities exclusive to buddhas (*āveṇika-buddha-dharmas*) which differs from the list in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*. While the MSA/Bh includes all of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*'s *āveṇika-buddha-dharmas* in the extended list above,[8] the text identifies a different set of eighteen characteristics as the *āveṇika-buddha-dharmas*. 20-21.57 and its commentary specify them as follows:

> six virtues of progression: the Tathāgata is without error, clamor, forgetfulness, scattered thoughts, the conceptualization of multiplicity, and indifference to what has not been considered;
> six virtues of acquisition: the Tathāgata is without loss of zeal, energy, mindfulness, concentration, liberation, and wisdom;
> three virtues of awareness: the awareness of a Tathāgata is unattached and unobstructed with regard to past, present, and future time;
> three virtues of action: the bodily, vocal, and mental actions of a Tathāgata are attended by awareness and follow after awareness.[9]

From a philosophical perspective, perhaps the most significant difference in this alternative list of the *āveṇika-buddha-dharmas* may be found in the third group: the awareness of a buddha is unobstructed with regard to the past, present, or future. While various Indian Buddhist texts have agreed in claiming that a buddha is omniscient, they have disagreed in deciding just what omniscience means. For example, some texts claim

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8. They correspond, respectively, to items (9), (10), (12), and (15) in the list above.

9. This same list of the *āveṇika-buddha-dharmas* also occurs at *Mahāvyutpatti* 136-153 (ed. Sakaki 1926), although there a slightly different order is given. Lamotte (1974: 95) states that there are two primary lists of the *āveṇika-buddha-dharmas*, that of the Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣikas (found in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, for example), and that proposed jointly by the Mahāsaṃghikas and Mahāyānists (found in the MSA/Bh, for example).

that a buddha is omniscient only in the sense that a buddha knows everything relevant to the attainment of awakening. Other texts (the MSA/Bh among them), however, make the much stronger claim that a buddha's omniscience signifies that a buddha's awareness encompasses all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance: a buddha is omniscient in the sense that a buddha always knows everything that is able to be known. Here, the MSABh's statement that the awareness of a buddha is unobstructed in all periods of time allows for this stronger form of omniscience.

While the list of the *āveṇika-buddha-dharma*s and the extended list of the characteristics of a buddha each take an analytical approach to understanding buddhahood, this is not the primary interpretation of buddhahood at work in the MSA/Bh. Indeed while the text does employ analytical lists and categories in order to understand buddhahood, the most significant interpretation of buddhahood at work in the text is not as focused on analyzing buddhahood into its constituent elements as it is on assimilating buddhahood to reality itself. This orientation may be seen for example in 9.4 and its commentary:

> sarva-dharmāś ca buddhatvaṃ dharmo naiva ca kaścana/
> śukla-dharma-mayaṃ tac ca na ca tais tan nirūpyate//
>
> sarva-dharmāś ca buddhatvaṃ tathatāyā abhinnatvāt tad-viśuddhi-prabhāvitatvāc ca buddhatvasya na ca kaścid dharmo 'sti parikalpitena dharma-svabhāvena/[10]
>
> All phenomena are buddhahood, but there are not any phenomena at all. It consists of pure qualities, but it is not defined by them.

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10. Following Funahashi's reading (1985: 25), I terminate the first statement of the commentary after the word *svabhāvena*.

> All phenomena are buddhahood because buddhahood is not different from thusness, and because its power is the purity of that. But there are not any phenomena because of the imagined nature of phenomena.

Here buddhahood is said to consist of pure qualities, such as the list of qualities exclusive to buddhas discussed above. But it is also stated that buddhahood cannot be defined by these pure qualities: buddhahood is not amenable to a comprehensive analytical interpretation. Even if one were to provide an extended list of all the qualities that comprise buddhahood, this list would not thereby capture its essential nature. Furthermore, it is stated that buddhahood is equivalent to thusness, a statement that indicates the text's move towards assimilating buddhahood to reality itself. In order to see how this theme is developed further, I will turn to another important presentation of buddhahood in the MSA/Bh: buddhahood as interpreted through the six categories.

The employment of the six categories—nature, cause, result, activity, endowment, and function (*svabhāva*, *hetu*, *phala*, *karma*, *yoga*, *vṛtti*)—in order to explain some concept is a device found not only in the MSA/Bh; it is in fact one standard way in which key concepts are discussed in certain Indian Buddhist texts.[11] The MSA/Bh uses the six categories in two places in the text that are relevant to our discussion: at 9.56-69 to discuss the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*), and at 20-21.60-61 to address the characteristics of buddhas directly.

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11. See Takasaki 1966: 400-408, a reprint of his article, "Description of ultimate reality by means of the six categories in Mahāyāna Buddhism." Takasaki points out that the six categories are used by the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*; also the *Ratnagotravibhāga* uses a set of ten categories, in which the first six are the ones listed above. The MSA/Bh, for example, uses the six categories to discuss the power of a bodhisattva (at MSABh ad 7.1-9) and the perfections (at MSABh ad 16.17-28).

At 9.56-59 the MSA/Bh addresses the topic of the purity of the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu-viśuddhi*). We saw in 9.4 above that buddhahood was assimilated to thusness, a standard term for reality in Mahāyāna Buddhist literature. In 9.56-59 buddhahood is assimilated to the realm of the real—the *dharma-dhātu*—which is another common term for reality. The first of these verses (9.56), which discusses the nature (*svabhāva*) or characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of the realm of the real, states:

> sarva-dharma-dvayāvāra-tathatā-śuddhi-lakṣaṇaḥ/
> vastu-jñāna-tad-ālamba-vaśitākṣaya-lakṣaṇaḥ//
>
> The characteristic is the thusness of all phenomena, purified of the two obstructions. The characteristic is the imperishable sovereignty of the awareness of objects and [the awareness] which is the support of that.

The commentary specifies that the two obstructions are the afflictive and cognitive obstructions (*kleśa-jñeyāvaraṇa*). From this verse we may note two things about the nature of the realm of the real: (1) it is thusness purified of afflictive and cognitive obstructions; and (2) it is comprised of two forms of awareness, the awareness of objects and the awareness which is its support. Although the commentary offers no further explanation of these two forms of awareness, it may be inferred that here the text is referring to the two standard types of awareness which a buddha is said to possess: non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*; here the awareness which is the support) and subsequently-attained awareness (*pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*; here the awareness of objects, or *vastu-jñāna*).[12] Non-constructive awareness is the basic awareness of a buddha: it does

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12. Both Sthiramati and Asvabhāva do explicitly equate the term *vastu-jñāna* with *pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*. Sthiramati, MSAVBh ad 9.56 (DT sems tsam MI 134a3): dngos po shes pa (*vastu-jñāna*) ni de'i rgyab nas thob pa dag pa 'jig rten pa'i ye shes (*pṛṣṭha-labdha-śuddha-laukika-jñāna*) la bya ste/. Asvabhāva, MSAT

not distinguish between subject and object and does not construct experience into individuated objects with characteristic properties. The subsequently-attained awareness is based on non-constructive awareness. This awareness may be understood to (at least appear to) engage in some form of conceptual construction—as 9.56 says, it is an awareness of objects.[13] Furthermore, it is a "worldly" (*laukika*) awareness, since it allows for buddhas to (at least appear to) act in the world on behalf of sentient beings.[14]

So from 9.56 we may note that the nature of the realm of the real—the nature of reality—is thusness and two forms of buddha-awareness. Given the text's strong form of non-dualism, however, thusness and buddha-awareness should not be ontologically distinguished from one another. The text cannot posit, for example, that thusness is the object perceived by the subject, buddha-awareness, since such a position would imply a clear distinction between subject and object, a distinction that the MSA/Bh is opposed to making. In order to avoid this implication, then, the text must be committed to an ontological position that assimilates thusness to buddha-awareness (and vice versa). Buddhahood is not *comprised of* the awareness of thusness; rather, buddhahood *just is*

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ad 9.56 (DT sems tsam BI 72b5): dngos po shes pa (*vastu-jñāna*) ni rjes la thob pa'i ye shes (*pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*) so/.

13. Furthermore, the commentary states that the subsequently-attained awareness is neither imagined nor not imagined: MSABh ad 11.31: na kalpo nāpi cākalpo lokottara-pṛṣṭha-labdhaṃ laukikaṃ jñānaṃ/. This implies that the subsequently-attained awareness may be involved with the process of conceptual construction or imagination, at least apparently. On the subsequently-attained awareness as conceptually constructive, see the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* (trans. Keenan 1980: 742). For another point of view, see Griffiths 1994: 163.

14. The *pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna* is sometimes referred to as *laukika-jñāna* (worldly awareness), while *nirvikalpa-jñāna* is sometimes called *lokottara-jñāna* (supramundane awareness); see, for example, MSABh ad 14.42-46.

awareness which is thusness, or alternatively, buddhahood *just is* thusness which is awareness. A thoroughgoing non-dualism, then, implies that buddhahood, insofar as it is aware of the whole of reality, must be assimilated to that reality.

The second verse in this section (9.57) addresses the cause (*hetu*) and result (*phala*) of the purity of the realm of the real. The verse states:

> sarvatas tathatā-jñāna-bhāvanā samudāgamaḥ/
> sarva-sattva-dvayādhāna-sarvathā 'kṣayatā phalaṃ//

> Attainment is the thorough cultivation of the awareness of thusness. The result is the unceasing provision of the two for all sentient beings in every way.

From this verse we see that the cause of the realm of the real is the cultivation of the awareness of thusness. This statement should be understood in terms of the claim in the preceding paragraph that thusness and awareness are not ontologically distinct. In order to effect the attainment of the realm of the real, then, one must cultivate an awareness of thusness; but when reality is actually realized—when the very nature of reality is fully present—awareness and thusness are no longer distinguishable. Regarding the result of the realm of the real, the verse states that it is a dual provision for all sentient beings; here the commentary specifies that the dual provision is the provision of benefits and happiness. So when the realm of the real is attained, buddhahood becomes a source of benefit for all sentient beings.

The third verse in this section deals with the activity (*karma*) and endowment (*yoga*) of the realm of the real. 9.58 states:

> kāya-vāk-citta-nirmāṇa-prayogopāya-karmakaḥ/
> samādhi-dhāraṇī-dvāra-dvayāmeya-samanvitaḥ//

> Activity is by means of the employment of transformations of body, speech, and mind. The endowment is concentration, the doors of the retentive powers, and the two immeasurables.

Here it is stated that the activity of the realm of the real should be understood in terms of the transformations (*nirmāṇa*) of body, speech, and mind. This seems to be a reference to a buddha's ability to employ embodiments of transformation (*nirmāṇa-kāya*) in order to aid sentient beings. Sthiramati, however, also adds that the activity of a buddha encompasses a buddha's ability to bring about transformations in the body, speech, and mind of others; for example, a buddha may cause trees to utter the dharma, or a śrāvaka to teach the Mahāyāna.[15] The second part of the verse deals with the endowment of the realm of the real. The term endowment refers to the qualities that a buddha is said to possess. In the verse, they are listed as concentration, the retentive powers, and the two immeasurables—which the commentary specifies as immeasurable provisions of merit and knowledge (*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*). It should be noted that here the text does not provide as extended a list of the qualities of a buddha as is found at 20-21.43-59 (discussed above). In fact, the qualities listed here are not found in the extended list. Furthermore, it should be noted that since the endowment of the realm of the real is distinct from its nature, the two should not be confused; that is to say, the qualities of the realm of the real are not the same as its nature. This implies, again, that buddhahood is not amenable to a comprehensive analysis into its constituent components.

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15. See MSAVBh ad 9.58 (DT sems tsam MI 134b5ff.).

The last verse in this section deals with the final element in the list of six categories, the function (*vṛtti*) of the realm of the real. 9.59 states:

> svabhāva-dharma-saṃbhoga-nirmāṇair bhinna-vṛttikaḥ/
> dharma-dhātur viśuddho 'yaṃ buddhānāṃ samudāhṛtaḥ//
>
> Function is varied according to essence, enjoyment of dharma, and transformation. This is said to be the purity of the realm of the real of buddhas.

This verse specifies that the function of the purity of the realm of the real is threefold, and the three functions correspond to the three embodiments of a buddha: the essential body (*svābhāvika-kāya*), the body of enjoyment (*sāṃbhogika-kāya*), and the body of transformation (*nairmāṇika-kāya*). I will say more about these below. First, however, I will examine another location in the MSA/Bh where the six categories are employed.

In the final chapter of the text, after the verses which list and offer homage to the qualities of a buddha, the MSA closes with two verses on the characteristics of a buddha. Here at 20-21.60-61, the text employs the six categories to explain the topic of buddhahood. The analysis given in these verses and commentary closely parallels the analysis of the purity of the realm of the real given in 9.56-59. At 20-21.60-61, the commentary states that the nature (*svabhāva*) of buddhas is purified thusness, which is the ultimate, or the perfected.[16] Their cause (*hetu*) is the bodhisattva-stages; their result (*phala*) is the attainment of preeminence among sentient beings; their activity (*karma*) is the liberation all sentient beings; their endowment (*yoga*) is the possession of inexhaustible, incomparable qualities; and their function (*vṛtti*) is manifesting

16. MSABh ad 20-21.60-61: tatra viśuddhā tathatā niṣpannaḥ paramārthaḥ/.

embodiments of transformation and enjoyment, and remaining invisible in the real embodiment (*dharma-kāya*). Although the definitions of cause, result, and activity given here are not the same as those given at 9.56-59, they are certainly not incompatible with one another.[17] And with regard to nature, endowment, and function, the definitions offered here are substantially the same as those offered at 9.56-59.

There are two important points that should be drawn from the MSA/Bh's six-category analyses of the realm of the real and buddhahood. The first point is that buddhahood should be understood as equivalent to the realm of the real (i.e., *buddhatva* just is the *dharma-dhātu*). This point is clear in that the six-category analysis of each is substantially the same: the nature of both is purified thusness; the function of both is manifesting the three embodiments of buddhahood. Thus, perhaps it is not inappropriate to employ the phrase, "buddhahood, or the realm of the real," just as Spinoza employs the phrase, "God, or nature": buddhahood and the realm of the real—like God and nature in Spinoza's *Ethics*—are not ontologically distinct. The second point to be drawn from the six-category analyses is that the nature of the realm of the real (or the nature of buddhahood)—identified as purified thusness—is clearly distinguished from its endowment—identified as the possession of certain qualities. So the nature of the realm of the real (or the nature of buddhahood) is not fully comprehensible in terms of specific, manifest qualities. There thus seems to be a distinction between buddhahood as it is in

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17. For example, with regard to cause: on the bodhisattva-stages one cultivates the awareness of thusness; with regard to result: through attaining preeminence among sentient beings, a buddha provides for other sentient beings; and with regard to activity: a buddha liberates sentient beings through transformations of body, speech, and mind.

itself and buddhahood as it appears (manifests) to other sentient beings. Buddhahood as it is in itself is just purified thusness; as it appears to sentient beings, however, it is endowed with various incomparable virtues, such as the ability to manifest in the world as a fully awakened being possessed of great wisdom and compassion.

This leads to the next means through which buddhahood is understood in the MSA/Bh: the three embodiments of a buddha (*buddha-kāya*). Since this topic has already been treated in detail elsewhere,[18] my aim here will be to provide a summary of the most important points made by the text. According to the commentary, 9.60-66 deal with the analysis of the embodiments of a buddha. The first of these verses and its commentary state:

> svābhāviko 'tha sāṃbhogyaḥ kāyo nairmāṇiko 'paraḥ/
> kāya-bhedā hi buddhānāṃ prathamas tu dvayāśrayaḥ//
>
> trividhaḥ kāyo buddhānāṃ/ svābhāviko dharma-kāya āśraya-parāvṛtti-lakṣaṇaḥ/ sāṃbhogiko yena parṣan-maṇḍaleṣu dharma-saṃbhogaṃ karoti/ nairmāṇiko yena nirmāṇena sattvārthaṃ karoti/
>
> The divisions of the body of buddhas: body of essence, enjoyment, and also transformation. But the first is the basis of the [other] two.
>
> The body of buddhas is threefold. That of essence is the real body, which has the characteristic of transformation of the basis. That of enjoyment is the one by which there is enjoyment of the dharma in the circles of assemblies. That of transformation is the one by which the benefits of sentient beings are carried out through transformations.

This verse identifies the three embodiments of buddhas as the body of essence, the body of enjoyment, and the body of transformation. The commentary equates the essential

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18. See, e.g., Makransky 1997: 39-108 and Griffiths 1994: 90-180.

body with the real body (*dharma-kāya*) of buddhas, and the verse states that this essential body is the basis of the bodies of enjoyment and transformation. The next verses (9.61-65) go on to explain each of the embodiments. Briefly stated, the essential body is buddhahood as it is in itself, while a body of enjoyment is a manifestation of a buddha to advanced spiritual practitioners in a buddha-field, and a body of transformation is a manifestation of a buddha to ordinary sentient beings in a world. Again, the MSA/Bh posits a distinction between buddhahood as it is in itself (here represented by the *svābhāvika-kāya*) and buddhahood as it appears to sentient beings (here represented by the *sāṃbhogika-* and *nairmāṇika-kāyas*).

The final verse in this section discusses the identity and permanence of the embodiments of buddhas. 9.66 states:

> āśrayeṇāśayenāpi karmaṇā te samā matāḥ/
> prakṛtyā 'sraṃsanenāpi prabandhenaiṣu nityatā//
>
> By their basis, intention, and activity, they are properly thought of as identical.
> By nature, in constancy, and through continuity, they are permanent.

According to this verse and its commentary, the three embodiments of buddhahood are identical for all buddhas; that is to say, all buddhas share the same three embodiments. The embodiments of all buddhas are identical in terms of their basis since their basis is the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*). And they are identical in terms of their intention and activity since all buddhas have the same intention and participate in the same activity. The embodiments of all buddhas are also said to be permanent. They are permanent by nature because the essential body is permanent by nature. They are permanent in constancy because the body of enjoyment teaches the dharma without

interruption. And they are permanent through continuity because the body of transformation is continuously manifested.

The discussion of the three embodiments of buddhahood is followed by verses on the four awarenesses of a buddha. In the MSAVBh, Sthiramati states that buddhahood is encompassed by five topics: the purity of the realm of the real (discussed above through the six categories) and the four awarenesses.[19] So the four awarenesses play a central role in the interpretation of buddhahood. 9.67-76 discuss the mirror-awareness (*ādarśa-jñāna*), equality-awareness (*samatā-jñāna*), analytical-awareness (*pratyavekṣā-jñāna*), and accomplishing-awareness (*kṛtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna*). 9.67-68 state:

> ādarśa-jñānam acalaṃ traya-jñānaṃ tad-āśritaṃ/
> samatā pratyavekṣāyāṃ kṛtyānuṣṭhāna eva ca//
>
> ādarśa-jñānam amamāparicchinnaṃ[20] sadānugaṃ/
> sarva-jñeyeṣv asaṃmūḍhaṃ na ca teṣv āmukhaṃ sadā//
>
> Mirror-awareness is unmoving. Three awarenesses—equality, with respect to analysis, and accomplishing—are based on it.
>
> Mirror-awareness is without ego, without limit, always occurring, without confusion regarding any object of knowledge, and it never faces them.

From the first verse we see that mirror-awareness is the basis of the other three awarenesses. While it is unmoving, the other three awarenesses are fluctuating. While mirror-awareness always abides in a timeless realm, the other three awarenesses operate in conditioned existence. The commentary to 9.68 states that mirror-awareness is without

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19. MSAVBh intro ad 9.1-3 (DT sems tsam MI 106a6-7). These five topics also comprise a central part of the *Buddhabhūmi-sūtra* (trans. Keenan 1980: 541).

20. In translating this verse, I follow the commentary in dividing *amama* from *aparicchinna*.

any sense of self, and without spatial or temporal limits. Since it is free from all obstructions, it has no confusion or error with regard to objects of knowledge. But it should also be understood that mirror-awareness does not confront objects of knowledge; that is to say, mirror-awareness does not stand in a subject-object relation with respect to objects of knowledge. The commentary makes this clear by stating that mirror-awareness is without modes of appearance (*anākāratva*). While all objects of knowledge are perfectly reflected in mirror-awareness, mirror-awareness does not function to discriminate these objects of knowledge into distinct modes of appearance; it does not construct distinct objects in opposition to itself as an apprehending subject. In this sense, then, mirror-awareness may be understood as equivalent to the non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) mentioned above in my comments to 9.56.[21]

After discussing mirror-awareness, the MSA/Bh moves on to discuss the other three awarenesses which are based on it. Again, just as mirror-awareness may be understood as equivalent to non-constructive awareness, so too may the other three awarenesses—equality, analytical, and accomplishing—be understood as equivalent to the subsequently-attained awareness (*pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*) discussed above. While this equivalence is not directly stated in the text, it may be inferred in that these three awarenesses allow for a buddha to (at least appear to) function in conditioned existence, just as the subsequently-attained awareness—or worldly awareness—does. This

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21. Sthiramati explicitly identifies mirror-awareness (*me long lta bu 'i ye shes*) as non-constructive awareness (*rnam par mi rtog pa'i ye shes*); see MSAVBh ad 9.69 (DT sems tsam MI 140a6). Hakamaya (1971: 469–466) states that while some commentators have understood mirror-awareness as both non-constructive and subsequently-attained awareness, Sthiramati and Asvabhāva (in the MSAT) consider mirror-awareness as equivalent only to non-constructive awareness.

functional aspect of the other three awarenesses is demonstrated through their association with the embodiments of buddhahood.

In the chapter on *nirvāṇa* I offered a translation of 9.70 which states that the equality-awareness (*samatā-jñāna*) is known as such because it has entered non-abiding nirvāṇa, wherein it is equally non-abiding in both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Thus equality-awareness is closely associated with a buddha's activity in conditioned existence. 9.71 makes this association more explicit:

> mahāmaitrī-kṛpābhyāṃ ca sarva-kālānugaṃ mataṃ/
> yathādhimokṣaṃ sattvānāṃ buddha-bimba-nidarśakaṃ//
>
> It should be properly thought of as always having great benevolence and compassion; it shows buddha-forms to sentient beings in accordance with their inclinations.

Here we can see that equality-awareness is said to manifest buddha-forms to sentient beings. This would seem to indicate that it may be linked to the activities of the body of enjoyment (*sāṃbhogika-kāya*) and/or the body of transformation (*nairmāṇika-kāya*), since it is through these two embodiments that buddhas manifest to sentient beings. In his subcommentary, however, Sthiramati directly links the equality-awareness only to the body of enjoyment.[22]

While neither the verse-text nor the commentary makes an explicit link between the equality-awareness and one particular embodiment of buddhahood, the text does allow for both the analytical- and accomplishing-awarenesses to be directly related to a

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22. See MSAVBh ad 9.60 (DT sems tsam MI 135b7).

specific embodiment. At 9.73 the analytical-awareness (*pratyavekṣā-jñāna*) is closely linked to the body of enjoyment. This verse states:

> pariṣan-maṇḍale sarva-vibhūtīnāṃ nidarśakaṃ/
> sarva-saṃśaya-vicchedi mahādharma-pravarṣakaṃ//
>
> It displays all sovereignties in the circles of assemblies, it cuts off all doubts, and it rains down the great dharma.

Here we can see that the functioning of analytical-awareness is described in the same terms as the activity of the body of enjoyment.[23] Both operate to teach the dharma in the context of circles of assemblies of bodhisattvas. In the following verse, the accomplishing-awareness (*kṛtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna*) is directly related to the body of transformation. 9.74 states:

> kṛtyānuṣṭhānatā-jñānaṃ nirmāṇaiḥ sarva-dhātuṣu/
> citrāprameyācintyaiś ca sarva-sattvārtha-kārakaṃ//
>
> The accomplishing-awareness brings about the benefit of all sentient beings in all the realms through transformations that are varied, innumerable, and inconceivable.

Here the accomplishing-awareness is said to bring benefits to sentient beings through various transformations (*nirmāṇa*), which is a reference to the body of transformation (*nairmāṇika-kāya*). Thus the accomplishing-awareness is the awareness which operates with (or as) the body of transformation.

Although neither the verse-text nor the commentary specifically does so, the four awarenesses discussed here may each be related to a specific transformation of the basis (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*). In his subcommentary, Sthiramati states that mirror-awareness (*me*

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23. Recall MSABh ad 9.60: sāṃbhogiko yena parṣan-maṇḍaleṣu dharma-saṃbhogaṃ karoti/.

long lta bu'i ye shes) is due to the transformation of the store-consciousness, equality-awareness (*mnyam pa nyid kyi ye shes*) is due to the transformation of the defiled consciousness, analytical-awareness (*so sor kun tu rtog pa'i ye shes*) is due to the transformation of mental consciousness, and accomplishing-awareness (*bya ba grub pa'i ye shes*) is due to the transformation of the five sensory consciousness.[24] According to Lévi (1911: 88), the Chinese version of the MSA makes the same set of relations: at 9.67, the text states that mirror-awareness is due to the transformation of the eighth consciousness (store-consciousness), etc.[25] Thus in both Sthiramati and the Chinese text of the MSA, since the store-consciousness is the basis of all other forms of consciousness, through its transformation, mirror-awareness becomes the basis of all other forms of buddha-awareness.

In the chapter on *bodhi*, I discussed the link between the awakening of a buddha and omniscience—defined as an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. And since the awakening of a buddha is not something distinct from buddhahood itself, it is not surprising that the MSA/Bh also identifies buddhahood with omniscience. The clearest statement of this may be seen at 9.2:

> sarvākāra-jñatāvāptiḥ sarvāvaraṇa-nirmalā/
> vivṛtā ratna-peṭeva buddhatvaṃ samudāhṛtaṃ//
>
> Obtaining the awareness of all modes of appearance, purified of all obstructions, buddhahood is said to be like an uncovered basket of jewels.

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24. MSAVBh intro ad 9.12 (DT sems tsam MI 113b4-5).

25. This is also pointed out by Nagao 1991: 254, note 27.

Here the text identifies buddhahood with the attainment of an awareness of all modes of appearance. Furthermore, as we saw in the chapter on awakening, the commentary to 20-21.58 identifies the "awakening which has all modes of appearance" with an "awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance." Also recall that mirror-awareness—an awareness that is central to the MSA/Bh's interpretation of buddhahood—is defined as "without confusion regarding any object of knowledge." So from this we can see that the MSA/Bh understands buddhahood in terms of an awareness of all modes of appearance and all objects of knowledge; in short, buddhahood is omniscience.

A problem arises, however, with the identification of buddhahood with an awareness of all modes of appearance. In discussing mirror-awareness, I mentioned that the commentary defines it as *anākāratva*, without modes of appearance. How, then, can buddhahood be understood as an awareness of all modes of appearance? The answer to this question depends on how awareness itself is ultimately understood. Many later Indian Buddhist commentators, for example, were divided over the issue of whether awareness is fundamentally with modes of appearance (*sākāravāda*) or without them (*nirākāravāda*).[26] While there is no need to enter into the complexities of that discussion here, it should be noted that the MSA/Bh precedes the fully developed controversy between *sākāravādin*s and *nirākāravādin*s. Hence, the use of the term *anākāratva* in the MSABh does not necessarily imply that the term was given the same meaning that it was

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26. See Kajiyama 1965.

in the later controversy. So for the commentary to claim that mirror-awareness is *anākāratva*, is not necessarily for it to mean that awareness itself is fundamentally without any modes of appearance whatsoever. One solution to the apparent contradiction between the text's claims that buddhahood is an awareness of all modes of appearance and that mirror-awareness is without modes of appearance, is to understand the second use of the phrase "modes of appearance" as qualified. That is to say, mirror-awareness is without "particular" modes of appearance which construct the seamless array of "all modes of appearance" into discrete appearances of objects with specific characteristics. Put in another way, mirror-awareness is a non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*) reflecting all modes of appearance, without thereby constructing any particular modes of appearance.

Comments on *buddhatva*

In order to map out the MSA/Bh's various claims regarding the awarenesses and embodiments of buddhahood, we may make the following chart of correspondences:

twofold awareness	fourfold awareness	embodiment
non-constructive	mirror-awareness	essence
subsequently-attained	equality-awareness	enjoyment
	analytical-awareness	enjoyment
	accomplishing-awareness	transformation

This chart indicates the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the differences between buddhahood as it is in itself and buddhahood as it appears to sentient beings, in the context of conditioned existence. The first row of the chart identifies the text's view of buddhahood

as it is in itself: it is a non-constructive awareness that perfectly reflects all objects of knowledge, without thereby constructing them into discrete objects in opposition to some knowing subject. Considered in terms of the three-body model, this corresponds to the essential body, which the text identifies as the real body (*dharma-kāya*) of buddhahood. The last three rows of the chart identify the text's view of buddhahood in its functional aspects. According to the MSA/Bh, buddhahood, in the context of conditioned existence, is a subsequently-attained awareness which functions to: (1) view all phenomena as ultimately equal—whether self or other, saṃsāra or nirvāṇa (i.e., equality-awareness); (2) identify both the particular and general characteristics of all phenomena,[27] and teach the dharma to assemblies of bodhisattvas (i.e., analytical-awareness); and (3) carry out the aims of all sentient beings (i.e., accomplishing-awareness). And in terms of the three-body model, buddhahood is described as manifesting in conditioned existence through embodiments of enjoyment and transformation.

It should be kept in mind that in each column of the chart, the first row is understood as the basis of the other rows: non-constructive awareness is said to be the basis of the subsequently-attained awareness; mirror-awareness, the basis of the other three awarenesses; and the essential body, the basis of the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation. But if the latter attainments are based on the former, then to what extent does the text consider these latter attainments to be ultimately real? That is to say, are the equality-, analytical-, and accomplishing-awarenesses taken to be actual awarenesses of a

27. On this point see the *Buddhabhūmyupadeśa* (trans. Keenan 1980: 747-753).

buddha? Or are they just conventional appearances? And are the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation interpreted as ultimately real? Or are they fundamentally only conventional appearances?

While the MSA/Bh offers no clear response to these questions, if we read the text as consistent it must be committed to some strong form of the thesis that mirror-awareness is the basis of the other forms of awareness, and that the essential body is the basis of the other embodiments. That is to say, I think the text would have to be committed to a position emphasizing the reality of the former (viz., mirror-awareness and essential body), while downplaying the reality of the latter (viz., the other three awarenesses and the other two embodiments). And in fact, support for this position can be found in certain statements in the text. In the commentary to 11.31, for example, in describing the four objects of knowledge, the text states:

akalpas tathatā lokottaraṃ ca jñānaṃ/

Non-imagined [objects of knowledge are] thusness, or supramundane awareness. Recall that supramundane awareness is another term for non-constructive awareness, which may be equated with mirror-awareness. So here mirror-awareness may be (albeit indirectly) related to thusness. And since thusness is a term for reality, mirror-awareness may be related to reality itself. No such relation is established between subsequently-attained awareness and thusness, nor is any such relation established between the three awarenesses based on mirror-awareness and thusness. And since the latter awarenesses are described as based on the former, the implication is that non-constructive, mirror-awareness is real, while the subsequently-attained, other three awareness depend on the

reality of that fundamental awareness. But if the other three awarenesses depend on the reality of a fundamental awareness, does that mean that the text understands them to be just conventional appearances? Some indications of an answer to this question may be found in returning to the three-body model of buddhahood in the text.

Recall that the MSABh refers to the essential body (*svābhāvika-kāya*) as the real body (*dharma-kāya*).[28] This indicates that the essential body is understood to be somehow grounded in reality. Furthermore, I translated 9.66 above as stating:

> By their basis, intention, and activity, they are properly thought of as identical.
> By nature, in constancy, and through continuity, they are permanent.

Here the commentary explains that the three bodies are identical for all buddhas because their basis is the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*). The commentary explicitly states that the bodies are permanent by nature because the essential body is permanent by nature. So here the reality of the essential body (or the "real body," *dharma-kāya*) is emphasized: it is permanent, hence it has always existed. Recall that the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation are said to be based on the essential body. So, again, insofar as the former two embodiments are interpreted as real, their reality is based on that of the essential body. Furthermore, in one place the verse-text refers to the "modes of appearance" of the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation,[29] a reference which emphasizes the appearance of these embodiments (their phenomenal aspect), rather than their reality (their ontological aspect). And since the latter three awarenesses are said to

28. See MSABh ad 9.60, translated above.

29. The second half of MSA 9.63 reads: dvayor dvayārtha-saṃpattiḥ sarvākārā pratiṣṭhitā//.

operate in conjunction with (or manifest as) the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation, their phenomenal aspect is also emphasized over their ontological aspect.

It seems, then, that while the MSA/Bh asserts the ultimate reality of the non-constructive, mirror-awareness (taken to be the fundamental awareness of buddhahood), the text does not give the same status to the subsequently-attained, other three awarenesses. And while the text asserts the ultimate reality of the essential body, again, the same status is not accorded to the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation. But while the MSA/Bh does not characterize the latter awarenesses and embodiments as ultimately real, neither does it characterize them as entirely unreal. Rather, they are interpreted as conventional realities, as modes of functioning directed towards aiding sentient beings.

A different but related point to be noted from the exegesis of buddhahood in the text is that the MSA/Bh develops a metaphysical, rather than primarily soteriological, interpretation of buddhahood. Evidence for this may be seen in the way that buddhahood is assimilated to reality itself, and in the way that the fundamental awareness of a buddha (i.e., non-constructive, mirror-awareness) is directly related to thusness. Furthermore, recall that the sixfold analysis of buddhahood is substantially equivalent to the sixfold analysis of the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*). All of this indicates that from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, buddhahood is not some particular stage of spiritual development that an individual may attain in order to terminate the condition of suffering. Rather, buddhahood is characterized as a complete break with any form of individual existence, a radical transformation of the basis of personal existence, wherein traces of

individuality are erased and replaced by an omniscient awareness that is equivalent to or coextensive with reality itself. And as such, as was stated above, buddhahood is understood to be permanent: it has always existed. Thus, according to the MSA/Bh, in attaining buddhahood, a bodhisattva moves beyond personal existence and attains (or dissipates into) an eternal form of existence coextensive with reality.

This metaphysical interpretation of buddhahood may be juxtaposed with the MSA/Bh's treatment of Hīnayāna attainments: the attainment of the awakening of a śrāvaka or a pratyekabuddha, and the attainment of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. In the case of Hīnayāna attainments, there is a much clearer sense in which these attainments are characterized as soteriological rather than metaphysical (although they certainly have metaphysical implications). Hīnayāna attainments, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, may be viewed as therapeutic: if the root disease is pervasive suffering (*duḥkha*), the Hīnayāna is a form of therapy which permanently eradicates suffering. The MSA/Bh does affirm the attainments of the Hīnayāna as an effective form of therapy—they are taken to be soteriologically efficacious. But from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, they are little more than that. The Hīnayāna, for example, is not described as bringing one to the state of being coextensive with reality itself; it is simply described as eradicating suffering. In the text's view, however, the Mahāyāna leads to the complete understanding of reality, to the state of buddhahood, which is interpreted as an awareness that is coextensive with or equivalent to thusness.

Part III
Soteriological Vehicles

Chapter 8
Introduction to *yāna*-theories

In the general introduction I introduced the concept of a soteriology. On my definition, a soteriology is a system of thought which entails two elements: (1) a diagnosis of the human condition which characterizes that condition in terms of some fundamental malady; and (2) a prescription for the termination of the malady. Thus soteriological goals (such as nirvāṇa or *bodhi*) are goals which pertain to the termination of the fundamentally disturbed aspect of human existence; and soteriological theories are theories which diagnose the human condition as disordered or disturbed in some fundamental way, and which offer prescriptions for terminating the disorder or malady.

Given this definition of soteriology, it may clearly be seen that a specific soteriology is at work in the MSA/Bh since: (1) in accordance with the four noble truths, the MSA/Bh diagnoses sentient existence as pervaded by suffering (*duḥkha*); and (2) the MSA/Bh posits a prescription for the termination of suffering. Furthermore, the text specifies that there are distinct soteriological goals—distinct forms of nirvāṇa and awakening—and it relates these distinct goals to distinct vehicles, viz., the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. And since the MSA/Bh's theory of the distinction between Buddhist vehicles (*yānas*) is based upon, and mutually implicated with, the soteriology at work in the text, the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory may be seen as one sort of soteriological theory.

But exactly what sort of soteriological theory is a *yāna*-theory? What does such a theory do? What work does it accomplish? For our purposes, a Buddhist *yāna*-theory may be understood as a theory that maps out soteriological possibilities: a *yāna*-theory

may be seen as a soteriological theory that charts out possible courses for terminating the suffering of sentient existence. We might usefully consider a *yāna*-theory to be a type of "path-theory," since it is concerned with identifying the ultimate goals or ends that may be attained, and with mapping out various paths for attaining those goals. In terms of the definition of soteriology that I offered, a *yāna*-theory pertains more to the second part of the two-part definition. That is to say, a *yāna*-theory is more a prescriptive soteriological theory than a diagnostic one, since it is more concerned with the issue of terminating suffering than it is with identifying the nature or extent of suffering.

While there are certainly many functions that a *yāna*-theory may accomplish, there are two functions in particular which I would like to pick out for further consideration: a prescriptive function and an explanatory function. The prescriptive function of a *yāna*-theory is to chart out various possible soteriological goals and relate them to the various soteriological vehicles. In this way, the most exalted, efficacious, or feasible goal may be identified. When the appropriate goal is identified (a process that the theory may intend to influence through its arrangement of a hierarchy of goals),[1] the *yāna*-theory can then specify which vehicle should be taken up: if some particular goal is aimed for, a *yāna*-theory prescribes the vehicle that would be most efficacious for its attainment. So, for example, according to the *yāna*-theory of the MSA/Bh, if termination in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning is the goal intended, then the Hīnayāna should be

1. Note, however, that the arrangement of soteriological goals in a hierarchy does not necessarily imply that the highest goal is the one that the theory intends to be pursued. For example, a non-Mahāyāna path-theory may offer some form of a *triyāna*-theory, but not thereby intend that those who accept the theory pursue the goal of buddhahood.

followed, but if the complete and perfect awakening of a buddha is intended, then the Mahāyāna should be followed.

Part of the prescriptive function of a *yāna*-theory, then, is to distinguish the beliefs and practices which comprise the various Buddhist vehicles. For example, a *yāna*-theory may identify certain practices as Mahāyānist and exclude others as non-Mahāyānist. A specific case of this may be seen when the MSA/Bh states that in the Mahāyāna there is the absence of conceptual construction of both persons and phenomena, and that the practice of the perfections is central to the Mahāyāna. So according to the *yāna*-theory of the MSA/Bh, if the (Mahāyāna) goal of buddhahood is to be attained, thought-patterns which engage in the conceptual construction of persons and phenomena should be avoided, and the perfections of giving, morality, etc. should be cultivated. The prescriptive function of a *yāna*-theory, then, is to serve as a chart for the prescription of practices that should be cultivated in order to attain some specified goal.

The explanatory function of a *yāna*-theory is to address certain questions or conceptual difficulties that may arise with regard to the issue of the unity or diversity of paths. For example, in its explanatory function, a *yāna*-theory may address questions such as: what is the status of those Buddhists who do not follow the Mahāyāna? What soteriological goals (if any) may they reach? What is the status of Hīnayāna arhats who are said to have attained the highest summit of Buddhist practice (nirvāṇa)? Answers to these questions would then establish a basis for answering further questions, such as: if Hīnayāna arhats do attain nirvāṇa, then what is nirvāṇa? And how is it different from awakening?

A *yāna*-theory may also directly relate to other sorts of soteriological theories. I referred to *yāna*-theories as path-theories, since they are concerned with specifying the ultimate goals that may be attained and with charting out the paths that lead to them. Another type of soteriological theory I would like to consider is a "potentiality-theory." Such a theory would be one that identifies the distinct categories or types of sentient beings, and indicates their respective potentialities for attaining specific soteriological goals. Examples of potentiality-theories are the gotra-theory and the *tathāgatagarbha*-theory. As we saw in the chapter on gotra, the gotra-theory in the MSA/Bh divides sentient beings into four categories, those that belong to the śrāvaka-, pratyekabuddha-, or bodhisattva-gotra, and those that are without gotra. But the MSA/Bh also employs a rudimentary *tathāgatagarbha*-theory, which affirms that all sentient beings have the potentiality for attaining buddhahood. So while the gotra-theory is certainly important to the MSA/Bh, it should not be understood as a theory that posits that there are predetermined categories to which sentient beings belong. And as we saw in the chapter on gotra, the MSA/Bh's gotra-theory is directly related to its *yāna*-theory, since the particular gotras are aligned with particular vehicles.

Potentiality-theories, like path-theories, may also carry out specific functions through addressing certain issues. But while path-theories would be more concerned with the relationship between possible paths and ultimate goals, potentiality-theories would be more concerned with the relationship between categories of sentient beings and ultimate goals. In the context of the MSA/Bh, potentiality-theories—such as the gotra-theory and the *tathāgatagarbha*-theory—address questions such as: if the Mahāyāna is

fully efficacious, then why is it not followed by everyone? What need is there for another soteriological vehicle? What are the obstructions in the way of practicing the Mahāyāna? Will every sentient being attain nirvāṇa? Will every sentient being become a buddha? May all sentient beings potentially attain some soteriological goal?

From this discussion, it may be seen that various soteriological goals and theories will be closely related to one another within the context of some particular system of thought. In fact, one indirect aim of this study is to determine precisely how soteriological goals and theories are related to one another in the MSA/Bh. The central aim of this study, however, is to provide an analysis of the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, as constructed in the MSA/Bh. But in order to do this effectively, it will first be necessary to have a clear sense of precisely how that distinction is presented in the text, which means understanding that distinction in the wider context of other soteriological terms and concepts in the text. In Part II, I discussed the gotra-theory and the goals of liberation, nirvāṇa, awakening, and buddhahood as presented in the MSA/Bh. I showed how those particular terms are defined in the text, related to one another, and aligned with Buddhist vehicles. Here in Part III, I will offer an exegesis of the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory. This exegesis in four chapters will look at the terms *triyāna*, *ekayāna*, *hīnayāna*, and *mahāyāna* as they are worked out in the text. When this task is completed, I will then be prepared to move on to the analysis of the MSA/Bh's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, which I will turn to in Part IV.

Chapter 9
Triyāna

Introduction

The *triyāna*-theory may be understood as a path-theory which identifies specific soteriological goals and maps out paths for attaining those goals.[1] From Part II of this study, we may gather that the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory posits that there are three distinct vehicles, the śrāvakayāna, pratyekabuddhayāna, and bodhisattvayāna, and that each vehicle is aligned with a particular gotra, and leads to a distinct form of awakening. According to the MSA/Bh, one may attain nirvāṇa without residual conditioning through the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna, but it is only through the bodhisattvayāna that one may attain non-abiding nirvāṇa. Furthermore, from the text's point of view, one may be purified of the afflictive obstructions (*kleśāvaraṇa*) through the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna, but it is only through the bodhisattvayāna that one may also be purified of the cognitive obstructions (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) and obtain an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance, which is equated with buddhahood.

Before turning to the exegesis of the *triyāna*-theory, it should be emphasized that the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory is not the only theory of soteriological vehicles found in Indian Buddhist texts. Another, perhaps better-known, theory of vehicles is the *ekayāna*-theory (the "one-vehicle theory") associated with texts such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-*

1. Fujita 1975: 89-95 offers an overview of the use of the term *triyāna* (*trīṇi yānāni*, *yānatraya*, etc.) in Indian Buddhist sources. He states that its earliest use may be found in the *Ekottarāgama* (ten locations cited), and also cites locations of its use in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, *Mahāvastu*, and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*. He notes, however, that the term never came into use in the Pāli tradition, and concludes that the term *triyāna* took shape in the northern schools.

sūtra and the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda-sūtra*. The *ekayāna*-theory, according to one standard account, posits that the only ultimately efficacious soteriological goal is buddhahood; the awakening and nirvāṇa obtained by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are only provisional or temporary; śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas must eventually enter the Mahāyāna and attain the complete awakening of a buddha.[2] Such a *yāna*-theory is markedly different from the one found in the MSA/Bh. According to the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory, the awakening and nirvāṇa obtained by śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are not just provisional; rather, they are fully efficacious: they lead to a permanent and final termination of the condition of suffering.

In this chapter I will discuss the *triyāna*-theory as it appears in the MSA/Bh. I will address the question of why the text employs a three-vehicle system, show how the text sets up this system, and explain what the text says about the three vehicles. Finally, I will discuss some conceptual issues involved with the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory.

Exegesis of the *triyāna*-theory

MSABh ad 19.46 identifies the three vehicles as the śrāvakayāna, pratyeka-buddhayāna, and Mahāyāna (sometimes referred to as the bodhisattvayāna or buddhayāna in other Indian Buddhist texts). The text aligns these three vehicles with the three traditional types of arhats (lit., "worthy ones"), or realized persons, discussed in Indian

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2. See Wayman and Wayman 1974: 37-39 and Williams 1989: 145-150; for more on the *ekayāna*-theory, see Fujita 1975 and Ruegg 1969: 177-188.

Buddhist texts: (śrāvaka-)arhats,[3] pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas. The term *śrāvaka* is derived from the verbal root *śru*, which means "to hear, be attentive, be obedient," thus *śrāvaka* may be translated as "hearer" or "disciple." Śrāvakas are understood as individuals who pursue and/or attain awakening and nirvāṇa through listening to the teachings of a buddha; they are typically exemplified by such figures as Śāriputra or Mahākāśyapa—early followers of the Buddha Śākyamuni identified in Indian Buddhist sūtras. The meaning of the term *pratyekabuddha* is not certain. While Edgerton, for example, translates it as "a Buddha for himself alone" (1970, vol. 2: 379), Norman (1983: 98-99) suggests that the term *pratyeka* may be derived from *pratyaya* ("condition" or "cause"), and offers the translation, "one awakened by an (external) cause," as opposed to one who is self-awakened. Pratyekabuddhas are understood to be persons who attain awakening at a time when the dharma has not been established in their world-realm, and who do not then go on to establish the dharma in any world-realm. This is one important characteristic that distinguishes buddhas from pratyekabuddhas: while buddhas establish the dharma in the world (in the sense of establishing the teaching—*śāsana*—and setting up an institution for its transmission), pratyekabuddhas do not.[4] Bodhisattvas are individuals who are in pursuit of the path to buddhahood. According to Indian Mahāyāna texts, bodhisattvas must progress through a number of stages of spiritual development (typically ten, as in the MSA/Bh). Upon completion of these stages—a process that is

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3. I employ the term *(śrāvaka-)arhat* to distinguish the first category of realized person from the categories of pratyekabuddha and buddha.

4. For an extended treatment of the type of the pratyekabuddha, see Ray 1994: 213-250.

said to require three incalculable aeons (*trīṇi kalpāsaṃkhyeyāni*; MSABh ad 19.60)—bodhisattvas become fully awakened buddhas.

Given that Indian Buddhist texts typically identify these three types of realized persons—(śrāvaka-)arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas—it is not surprising that a scheme of three vehicles may be found in texts such as the MSA/Bh. While the question of why precisely these three standard types of realized persons were recognized is certainly an interesting one, it is beyond the scope of this study.[5] What is important to note is that the MSA/Bh was not composed as a treatise developing an independent system of ideas. Rather, the MSA/Bh locates itself within a corpus of other Buddhist texts,[6] and within the broad context of a specific (albeit perhaps amorphous) Buddhist tradition—that of the Mahāyāna. Therefore, there are a number of categories which the MSA/Bh adopts from what it understands to be the (Mahāyāna) Buddhist tradition. One such category is that of the types of realized persons—(śrāvaka-)arhats, pratyekabuddhas, and buddhas. And having adopted the category of three types of arhats, it is reasonable that the MSA/Bh should conclude that there are three distinct, efficacious vehicles.

In Part II of this study, we have already seen that the three vehicles are distinguished in terms of gotra and awakening. At 19.46, however, the verse-text and commentary specifically distinguish the three vehicles in five ways:

> āśayād deśanāc caiva prayogāt saṃbhṛter api/
> samudāgama-bhedāc ca trividhaṃ yānam iṣyate//

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5. The most curious type of arhat is certainly that of the pratyekabuddha. For an overview of perspectives on the type of the pratyekabuddha, see Norman 1983.

6. Consider, for example, the list of texts cited in the MSABh, offered in Chapter 2 of this study.

yāna-prajñapti-vyavasthānaṃ trividhaṃ/ śrāvakayānaṃ/ pratyekabuddhayānaṃ/ mahāyānaṃ ca/ . . . yāna-traya-vyavasthānaṃ pañcabhir ākārair veditavyaṃ/ āśayato deśanātaḥ prayogataḥ saṃbhārataḥ samudāgamataś ca/ tatra hīnāṃ āśaya-deśanā-prayoga-saṃbhāra-samudāgamāḥ śrāvakayānaṃ madhyāḥ pratyekabuddhayānaṃ uttamā mahāyānaṃ/ yathāśayaṃ hi yathābhiprāyaṃ dharma-deśanābhibhavati/ yathā-deśanaṃ tathā prayogaḥ/ yathā-prayogaṃ saṃbhāraḥ/ yathā-saṃbhāraṃ ca bodhi-samudāgama iti/

It is known that there are three types of vehicle due to differences in intent, teaching, application, provision, and attainment.

The classification of the designation of vehicles is threefold: śrāvakayāna, pratyekabuddhayāna, and Mahāyāna. . . . The classification of the three vehicles should be known through five aspects: due to intent, teaching, application, provision, and attainment. There the intent, teaching, application, provision, and attainment of the śrāvakayāna are inferior, those of the pratyekabuddhayāna are middling, and those of the Mahāyāna are superior. According to the intent—according to the intention—the teaching of the dharma arises. According to the teaching, there is application. According to application, there are provisions. According to provisions, there is the attainment of awakening.

In this extended passage, the three vehicles are distinguished according to their intent, teaching, application, provision, and attainment. Although these terms are not clearly explained here, we may turn to another location in the text in order to better understand them. At 1.10, the verse-text and commentary explain why the śrāvakayāna and the Mahāyāna are mutually incompatible:

āśayasyopadeśasya prayogasya virodhataḥ/
upastambhasya kālasya yat hīnaṃ hīnam eva tat//

kathaṃ viruddhaṃ/ pañcabhir virodhaiḥ/ āśayopadeśa-prayoga-upastambha-kāla-virodhaiḥ/ śrāvakayāne hy ātma-parinirvāṇāyaivāśayas tad-artham evopadeśas tad-artham eva prayogaḥ parīttaś ca puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra-saṃgṛhīta upastambhaḥ kālena cālpena tad-artha-prāptir yāvat tribhir api janmabhiḥ/ mahāyāne tu sarvaṃ viparyayeṇa/

Because of the incompatibility of intent, teaching, application, support, and time, the lesser [vehicle] is truly inferior.

> How are [the śrāvakayāna and the Mahāyāna] incompatible? Due to five incompatibilities: of intent, teaching, application, support, and time. In the śrāvakayāna the intent is only the parinirvāṇa of oneself. The teaching has just the same purpose. The application also has just the same purpose. The support is the acquisition of limited provisions of merit and knowledge. And with a small amount of time, its goal may be obtained: even with only three births. But in the Mahāyāna, everything is the reverse.

Considering 19.46 and 1.10 together, we can see that both text-locations use nearly the same set of five characteristics to distinguish one vehicle from another: intent (*āśaya*), teaching (*deśanā*, *upadeśa*), application (*prayoga*), and provision (*saṃbhāra*, which MSABh ad 1.10 equates with *upastambha*, or "support"). They differ only in the last element: while 19.46 lists the fifth distinguishing characteristic as "attainment" (*samudāgama*), 1.10 lists it as "time" (*kāla*). Attainment and time are not, however, contradictory. In fact, the two may be easily reconciled with one another: the ultimate goal attained by the śrāvakayāna is inferior and so less time is required, while the ultimate goal attained by the Mahāyāna is superior and so a greater amount of time is required. Thus the lists provided by these two passages are compatible with one another.

According to these passages, then, the first characteristic that distinguishes the three vehicles is their intent (*āśaya*), which may be understood as their aim. In the śrāvakayāna—and by extension, in the pratyekabuddhayāna—the intent is only the parinirvāṇa of oneself. The ultimate goal of these two vehicles—their ultimate intent—is the attainment of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, or parinirvāṇa. In the Mahāyāna, however, the ultimate goal or intent is the attainment of buddhahood. According to another interpretation of intent offered by the text, in the śrāvakayāna (and by extension, in the pratyekabuddhayāna) the intent is only to achieve one's own benefit, while in the

Mahāyāna the intent is to achieve the benefit of both oneself and others.[7] These two interpretations of intent, however, may be brought together. In the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna the intent is the parinirvāṇa of oneself, an attainment wherein the condition of suffering has been fully eliminated for oneself, but wherein there is no ability to benefit others since all traces of conditioned existence have been eliminated. In the Mahāyāna, however, the intent or aim is buddhahood, an attainment wherein there is still the ability to benefit others through the buddha-bodies.

The second characteristic that distinguishes the three vehicles is their teaching (*deśanā*, or *upadeśa*). While not much is said about this topic in the two passages quoted above, it may be recalled from the chapter on awakening that the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna are associated with the teaching of the absence of self in persons, and the Mahāyāna is associated with the teaching of the absence of self in both persons and phenomena. The teachings of the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna emphasize the unreality of the self, but maintain that the phenomena which constitute the self are real. The teachings of the Mahāyāna, however, declare the unreality both of the self and of the phenomena which purportedly constitute the self.

The third and fourth characteristics that distinguish the three vehicles are their application (*prayoga*) and provision (*saṃbhāra*). From the term given for "application" (*prayoga*), we may infer that application refers to the extent to which one must apply oneself to, or practice in, the given vehicle. So the level of application in the śrāvakayāna

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7. See, e.g., MSABh ad 10.13: evaṃ parārthāśraya-deśitāt mahāyāna-dharmāt . . . svārthāśraya-deśitāt śrāvakayāna-dharmāt/; and MSABh ad 17.35: adhyāśayād bhūmi-praviṣṭānām ātma-para-samatāśaya-lābhāt/.

is inferior, etc. Furthermore, it is said that application gives rise to provisions. The provisions are identified as the provisions of merit and knowledge (*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*), a term that I referred to as an important means to the attainment of awakening. So from these two passages we may see that the provisions of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas are, respectively, inferior and middling. Since śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas only acquire a limited collection of provisions of merit and knowledge, they are only able to attain a more limited form of awakening. But since bodhisattvas acquire an unlimited collection of provisions of merit and knowledge,[8] they are able to attain an unlimited form of awakening. Also in the section of the MSA/Bh that discusses the provisions of merit and knowledge (18.38-41), 18.40 and its commentary state that a bodhisattva's provisions of merit and knowledge are for accomplishing the benefit of all persons (*sarvārtha-sādhaka*), both oneself and others. Thus the characteristic of provision may be linked to the characteristic of intent.

The fifth characteristic which distinguishes the three vehicles is their attainment (*samudāgama*)—or, according to 1.10, their time (*kāla*). The commentary to 19.46 makes it clear that the attainment referred to here is the attainment of awakening (*bodhi*), which, as we saw in the chapter on gotra (and as we see again in the commentary to 19.46), can be inferior, middling, or superior. Thus the three vehicles are distinguished according to the form of awakening that they lead to. Furthermore, according to the commentary to 1.10, the goal of the śrāvakayāna may be reached with only three births; the goal of the Mahāyāna, however, takes three incalculable aeons to reach.

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8. MSABh ad 9.58 identifies the "immeasurables" (*aprameya*) with the provisions of merit and knowledge

Another important point that is made in the MSA/Bh regarding the three vehicles is that buddhas and bodhisattvas mature sentient beings by means of all three vehicles. For example, MSABh ad 8.13 states that when bodhisattvas thoroughly mature sentient beings, they do so by means of the three vehicles; MSABh ad 9.14 states that a Tathāgata's transformation is universally active because it refers to the teachings of all the vehicles; and MSABh ad 12.9 states that the speech of Tathāgatas is well-disciplined because it teaches the methods (or "doctrines," *naya*) of the three vehicles.[9] From these examples it can be seen that buddhas and bodhisattvas teach all three vehicles, depending on the capacity of sentient beings. In relation to this, it should also be recalled that in the MSA/Bh, all three vehicles are understood as soteriologically efficacious: all three vehicles lead to a permanent termination of the condition of suffering. So when buddhas and bodhisattvas teach a particular vehicle to a particular sentient being, they are teaching that being how to arrive at a final termination of the condition of suffering; they are not simply teaching a provisional vehicle.

Comments on the *triyāna*-theory

In his study, *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra*, Ruegg discusses the *ekayāna*-theory in relation to doctrines about the eternality of the world, or the end of saṃsāra (1969: 205-217). Ruegg begins his discussion from the basis of a strong form of the *ekayāna*-theory, which posits that there is only one ultimately efficacious vehicle and

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(*puṇya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*).

9. In this connection, also see MSABh ad 2.3, ad 8.22, ad 9.52, ad 12.6, ad 12.8, ad 16.8, and ad 16.13; and MSA 19.20.

that all sentient beings will eventually attain supreme awakening through that vehicle. The problem with such a theory, according to Ruegg, is that it implies that there is an end to saṃsāra, since eventually all beings will attain buddhahood; and implying that there is an end to saṃsāra runs counter to traditions which state that the Buddha Śākyamuni identified this issue as an undetermined question (*avyākṛta-vastu*).

We may also consider the question of the eternality of the world, or the end of saṃsāra, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory. According to the text's *triyāna*-theory, there are three ultimately efficacious soteriological vehicles: that is, there are three distinct vehicles that lead to a permanent and final termination of the condition of suffering. Furthermore, recall from the chapter on gotra that even though all sentient beings have the potentiality for becoming fully awakened buddhas, not all beings are said to realize this potentiality. Some beings, for example, are said to acquire the śrāvaka-gotra and attain the awakening of a śrāvaka, and other beings are said to acquire the pratyekabuddha-gotra and attain the awakening of a pratyekabuddha. Still other beings are said to remain in saṃsāra for an indefinite period of time (perhaps even for an infinite period of time) without acquiring any gotra or attaining any soteriological goal. So in terms of the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory, if all sentient beings were to realize their potentiality and attain buddhahood (or at least attain the awakening of a śrāvaka or pratyekabuddha), then saṃsāra would come to an end; but if there were at least one sentient being who had not attained an ultimate soteriological goal, then saṃsāra would continue. Thus the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory does not itself imply either that saṃsāra has an end or that it does not. It allows this issue to remain an undetermined question.

Another issue that may be considered in relation to the *triyāna*-theory is the question of the extent of the compassion of buddhas. According to the MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory, there are three ultimately efficacious vehicles, so not everyone who attains a final soteriological goal will attain buddhahood. If buddhahood is understood to be the supreme goal for sentient beings, and if the object of the compassion of buddhas is understood to be the supreme benefit of all sentient beings, then if all sentient beings do not eventually attain buddhahood, it might be inferred that buddhas are somehow deficient in compassion.

This inference, however, is based on the premise that buddhas are the sole cause (or at least the dominant cause) of the spiritual attainments of sentient beings—a premise that the MSA/Bh certainly does not share. According to the MSA/Bh, a necessary prerequisite for attaining any soteriological goal is acquiring a gotra. And from the perspective of the MSA/Bh (3.11), a gotra is acquired through obtaining roots of good, which are in turn acquired through virtuous actions. So a necessary prerequisite for attaining any soteriological goal is, according to the text, virtuous action. One's own actions, then, are understood to be the dominant cause in determining whether or not one will attain awakening and nirvāṇa. The compassionate activity of buddhas is, however, taken to be a contributing cause: buddhas contribute to the spiritual maturation of sentient beings through their teachings and through manifesting by means of the buddha-bodies. On this reading of the MSA/Bh, then, buddhas are not able to alter the category of gotra to which a sentient being belongs through their own compassionate activity alone; they are, however, able to help sentient beings reach the potentiality of their gotra, through

teaching them the vehicle appropriate to their spiritual level. The MSA/Bh's *triyāna*-theory, then, does not presuppose a deficiency in the compassion of buddhas. What it does presuppose is that individuals—through their actions and capacities—play a rather strong role in working out their own salvation.

The final point I wish to make here is that even though the MSA/Bh offers a developed *triyāna*-theory, in actuality the text's *triyāna*-system may be effectively reduced to a *dviyāna*-system. In the text the śrāvakayāna and pratyekabuddhayāna are not substantially distinguished from one another: both are said to lead to less than complete forms of awakening—the awakening of the śrāvakayāna is "inferior" and that of the pratyekabuddhayāna is "middling." And in any case both the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna are said to ultimately terminate in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. So while the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna are understood as soteriologically efficacious, they are not taken to lead to an omniscient form of awakening, nor are they taken to result in the attainment of the buddha-bodies. It is in these senses, then, that the MSA/Bh categorizes those two vehicles together as "inferior."

The text is also rather explicit about equating the Hīnayāna with both the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna. The verse-text at 15.4, for example, refers to the "twofold Hīnayāna" (*nihīnayāna-dvividha*), which can only mean the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna. And the commentary to 18.1 refers to the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna as inferior (*hīna*) to the Mahāyāna.[10]

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10. MSABh ad 18.1: śrāvaka-pratyekabuddhānāṃ/ tad vihīnaṃ ca mahāyānād . . . /. Lévi (1911: 15), following the Tibetan, inserts the word *yānam* (Tib., *theg pa*) after *pratyekabuddhānāṃ*.

From the references made above it is clear that in the context of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna means the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna. So the three-vehicle-system of śrāvakayāna-pratyekabuddhayāna-bodhisattvayāna is reduced to the two-vehicle-system of Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna. Thus in order to understand the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory more fully, it will be necessary to understand specifically what the text says about the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Before I do that, however, I will turn to the MSA/Bh's treatment of the *ekayāna*.

Chapter 10
Ekayāna

Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, the MSA/Bh posits that there are three distinct vehicles that lead to distinct soteriological goals. Furthermore, we also saw that this system of three vehicles may effectively be reduced to a system of two vehicles: the threefold śrāvakayāna-pratyekabuddhayāna-bodhisattvayāna may be viewed in terms of the Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna. Although the text adheres to a (reducible) *triyāna*-system, it does nevertheless refer to the *ekayāna*—the "one vehicle." The MSA/Bh's use of the term *ekayāna* may at first seem incongruous, since the term ostensibly refers to the theory that there is actually only one efficacious soteriological vehicle. In this chapter I will explain this apparent incongruity.[1]

As I mentioned in discussing the *triyāna*-theory, the MSA/Bh is not an independent treatise. Rather, it is a text which identifies itself as belonging to a particular tradition, that of the Mahāyāna. Therefore the MSA/Bh adopts certain terms, concepts, and categories from what it understands to be the broader tradition in which it locates itself. All of this is not to say that the MSA/Bh is a thoroughly unoriginal text; quite to the contrary, the text is original both in that it introduces new terms, concepts, and categories, and in that it offers some interesting reinterpretations of inherited ones. The

1. I would like to introduce a distinction between the terms "*ekayāna*-theory" and "*ekayāna*-doctrine." By the former, I mean the theory that there is only one fully efficacious Buddhist soteriological vehicle; by the latter, I mean the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the term *ekayāna*, wherein the *ekayāna* is a non-definitive teaching.

term *ekayāna* is an example of a term that the MSA/Bh inherited from what it understands to be the broader tradition of which it is a part.[2] For example, the MSABh specifically mentions the *Śrīmālā-sūtra* (the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda-sūtra*), a Mahāyāna sūtra that is clearly associated with the *ekayāna*-theory; and while the MSABh does not specifically refer to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, this pivotal and widely known sūtra—which predates the composition of the MSA—is also closely associated with the *ekayāna*-theory.[3] Thus insofar as the MSA/Bh considers itself to be a Mahāyāna text—indeed an ornament (*alaṃkāra*) to the Mahāyāna sūtras—it is quite understandable that it would adopt the term *ekayāna* from other Mahāyāna texts.

Although the MSA/Bh adopts the term *ekayāna* from the broader Mahāyāna tradition, this by no means indicates that the text interprets that term in the same way as other texts in the tradition do. Given the standard Indian Buddhist distinction between *nītārtha* and *neyārtha*—that is, between meaning that is definitive and meaning that stands in need of interpretation—the MSA/Bh is able to determine for itself whether the *ekayāna* is to be understood as definitive (*nītārtha*) or as in need of interpretation (*neyārtha*). And since the MSA/Bh posits a (reducible) *triyāna*-system, it is clear that the text would have to identify the *ekayāna*-doctrine as in need of interpretation: to avoid self-contradiction, the text could not claim both that there are three efficacious

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2. Ruegg (1969: 178, note 1), for example, specifies locations of the use of the Pāli term *ekāyana* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-sutta*) and the *Majjhima-nikāya* (*Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*); it should be noted, however, that the term is not used in these texts to refer to the *ekayāna*-theory or the *ekayāna*-doctrine specified in note 1 above. It may also be interesting to note Ruegg's citation of uses of the term *ekāyana* in the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* and *Chāndogyopaniṣad*.

3. On the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*, its context, date, and *ekayāna*-theory, see Wayman and Wayman 1974: 1-55; and on the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, its date, and importance, see Hirakawa 1990: 282-286.

soteriological vehicles and that there is only one. But if the *ekayāna*-doctrine stands in need of interpretation—if it is not definitively true—then the question of the function of this doctrine may be raised: why is the *ekayāna* mentioned by any Mahāyāna text at all if it is not ultimately valid? What purpose does this doctrine serve? What is its indirect intention (*abhiprāya*)?

In this chapter, I will discuss the *ekayāna* as it appears in the MSA/Bh. I will present the *ekayāna* as it is understood by the MSA/Bh, and I will discuss the intended purpose of this doctrine according to the text. Then I will conclude with a few comments about the implications of the MSA/Bh's (re)interpretation of the *ekayāna*.

Exegesis of the *ekayāna*-doctrine

The term *ekayāna* is not used very often in the MSA/Bh. In fact other than at only one other location (ad 12.19), the use of the term is restricted to a seven-verse section of the text (11.53-59), specifically devoted to the topic of *ekayāna*. These verses make it clear that the *ekayāna*-doctrine is understood as in need of interpretation (*neyārtha*) and not as definitive (*nītārtha*). The commentary to 11.53 states:

> buddhatvam ekayānam evaṃ tatra tatra sūtre tena tenābhiprāyeṇaikayānatā[4] veditavyā na tu yāna-trayaṃ nāsti/
>
> Buddhahood is the one vehicle (*ekayāna*); thus the fact of one vehicle in various sūtras should be understood with this indirect intention; but it is not the case that there are not three vehicles.

4. Following Lévi (1911:125), I am reading *tenābhiprāyeṇaikayānatā* for *tanābhiprāyeṇaikayānatā*.

From this comment it may be seen that in the MSA/Bh the *ekayāna* is understood as equivalent to buddhahood: when a sūtra mentions the *ekayāna*, it should be understood as a reference to buddhahood, or the buddhayāna. This is the indirect intention, or meaning, of the term *ekayāna*. The *ekayāna*, then, was taught in order to achieve a certain purpose or goal, not in order to make a definitively true claim. Given this understanding of the *ekayāna*-doctrine, two issues may be raised: (1) what is the basis for claiming that there is only one vehicle? Are there any restricted senses in which the *ekayāna*-doctrine may be understood as literally true? And (2) for what purpose was it taught?[5]

The initial verse on the *ekayāna* addresses the first issue I have raised above: whether there are any restricted senses in which the assertion of the *ekayāna* is actually true. 11.53 states:

> dharma-nairātmya-muktīnāṃ tulyatvāt gotra-bhedataḥ/
> dvy-āśayāptes ca nirmāṇāt paryantād ekayānatā//
>
> Because of the similarity of dharma, absence of self, and liberation; because of the difference in gotra; because of the attainment of two intentions; because of transformation; and because of the limit: there is one vehicle.

This verse offers restricted senses in which the doctrine of *ekayāna* is true. Specifically, it identifies seven reasons why the *ekayāna*-doctrine may be understood as literally true in certain contexts. I will explain each one individually. (1) There is a similarity of dharma. The commentary explains this to mean that the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*) is identical for all arhats. Since the realm of the real may be understood as a synonym for reality, we may infer that reality is identical for śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and

5. Ruegg (1969: 199, note 1) identifies three criteria for deciding whether a certain claim is to be understood as intentional/in need of interpretation (*neyārtha*). Two of them correspond to the issues I have

bodhisattvas. Since any efficacious soteriological vehicle must in some way be grounded in reality, and since reality is identical for all arhats, all three vehicles may be viewed as one, since all three are grounded in reality. (2) There is a similarity in absence of self: all three vehicles teach that there is an absence of self, and so all three vehicles may be viewed as one vehicle. (3) The liberations of śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas are similar. As I stated in the chapter on liberation, while the liberations of all three vehicles are not exactly the same, they are similar in that each vehicle leads to release from saṃsāra and brings about liberation from the afflictive obstructions. So because of the similarity of their liberations, the three vehicles may be viewed as one.

The verse also lists further senses in which the *ekayāna*-doctrine may be understood as literally true. The next reason listed is that (4) there is a difference in gotra. According to the commentary, this means that those of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra will attain final liberation through the Mahāyāna. So since the Mahāyāna is taken up by persons of different gotras, it may be referred to as the one vehicle. Another reason offered is that (5) there is the attainment of two intentions. The commentary explains that buddhas and those śrāvakas who have practiced the provisions of awakening (*bodhi-saṃbhāra*) with the intention of buddhahood, both have the same intention. Thus buddhas and those particular śrāvakas go by one and the same vehicle. Another reason for the assertion of the *ekayāna* is that (6) through embodiments of transformation (*nirmāṇa-kāya*), buddhas manifest and (appear to) attain parinirvāṇa by means of the śrāvakayāna. Thus since buddhas—who have practiced the Mahāyāna—appear to attain

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raised here; the third is if the claim is incompatible with a canonical teaching that is definitive (*nītārtha*).

liberation through the śrāvakayāna, it may be asserted that there is one vehicle. The final reason given for the assertion of the *ekayāna* is that (7) the ultimate end or limit (*paryanta*) of all soteriological attainments is buddhahood, which may only be attained by one vehicle (viz., the Mahāyāna). So there is only one vehicle that leads to the ultimate soteriological goal. Thus in these restricted senses it may be asserted that the *ekayāna* is literally true.

But while the *ekayāna*-doctrine may be taken as literally true in restricted senses, the MSA/Bh holds that this theory is not definitive and stands in need of interpretation. Thus the next verses turn towards the second issue which I have raised above: that of the purpose of the *ekayāna*-doctrine. If the *ekayāna* is not definitively true, then it must have some intentional aim. 11.54 states:[6]

> For the purpose of attracting some, and for the purpose of supporting others, the buddhas taught the fact of one vehicle to those who are indefinite [in their gotra].

Here the commentary specifies that the *ekayāna* was taught in order to attract śrāvakas of an indefinite gotra and in order to support bodhisattvas of an indefinite gotra. As we saw in the discussion of gotra in Chapter 3, those of an indefinite gotra are able to lose their current gotra and obtain a different one. Thus śrāvakas of an indefinite gotra have the possibility of acquiring the bodhisattva-gotra and entering the Mahāyāna, while bodhisattvas of an indefinite gotra have the possibility of falling into the śrāvaka-gotra and going by the Hīnayāna. In order to bring about the former and prevent the latter, buddhas taught the doctrine of *ekayāna*: if śrāvakas were to become convinced that the

6. This verse was translated in Chapter 3, on gotra.

Mahāyāna and the śrāvakayāna were identical, there would be little barrier to their taking up the great vehicle and aiming for buddhahood. And by the same token, if bodhisattvas who were wavering in their commitment to the Mahāyāna were to believe only in the existence of the Mahāyāna (i.e., that the śrāvakayāna and the Mahāyāna were not distinct), they would be prevented from falling into the Hīnayāna. So the purpose of the *ekayāna*-doctrine is to attract śrāvakas and to maintain bodhisattvas in the Mahāyāna.

The remaining verses in this section deal with the types of śrāvakas who enter the Mahāyāna. The next two verses (11.55-56) state:

> śrāvako 'niyato dvedhā dṛṣṭādṛṣṭārtha-yānataḥ/
> dṛṣṭārtho vīta-rāgaś cāvīta-rāgo 'py asau mṛduḥ//
>
> tau ca labdhārya-mārgasya bhaveṣu pariṇāmanāt/
> acintya-pariṇāmikyā upapattyā samanvitau//
>
> There are two types of śrāvakas who are indefinite [in their gotra]: those who see and those who do not see the meaning of the vehicle. The ones that see the meaning [are divided into] those who have subdued the passions and those who have not subdued the passions; and they are slow.
>
> Both [of those who see the meaning of the vehicle]—due to ripening in states of existence in which the noble path has been obtained—are endowed with births that are ripened and beyond thought.

According to the commentary to 11.55, both types of śrāvakas of an indefinite gotra—those who see and those who do not see the meaning of the vehicle (and here, the vehicle referred to is the Mahāyāna)—go by means of the Mahāyāna. This seems to indicate that any person of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra will eventually enter the Mahāyāna. The verse also further subdivides the category of those who see the meaning of the vehicle into those who have subdued the passions and those who have not. Those śrāvakas who see

the meaning of the Mahāyāna attain rebirth as a result of the maturation of merit accrued during previous births in which they have obtained the noble path.

The next verse (11.57) discusses the subdivision of those who have subdued the passions and those who have not:

> praṇidhāna-vaśād eka upapattiṃ prapadyate/
> eko 'nāgāmitā-yogān nirmāṇaiḥ pratipadyate//

> One attains rebirth due to the power of a vow; and one practices by means of transformations due to the attainment of [the state of] a non-returner.

The commentary to this verse specifies that the ones who have subdued the passions refers to those have attained the state of a non-returner (*anāgāmin*). A non-returner is the third of the four traditional stages of spiritual development of a śrāvaka: the stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*) is one who has begun the practice of the dharma; the once-returner (*sakṛd-āgāmin*) is one who will return to this world only once more before attaining nirvāṇa; the non-returner (*anāgāmin*) is one who will no longer return to this world before attaining nirvāṇa; and the realized one (*arhat*) is one who has already attained awakening and nirvāṇa. These four categories, while very important to some non-Mahāyāna Indian Buddhist path-schemes, do not play much of a role in the MSA/Bh. Here it is only stated that those non-returners who are of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra practice by means of transformations (*nirmāṇa*), which indicates that these non-returners take up Mahāyāna practices through a particular transformation body (*nirmāṇa-kāya*; MSABh ad 11.59). As for the other category, those who have not subdued the passions, they are said to obtain a rebirth through the power of a vow. Thus one who has developed some inclination towards the Mahāyāna (i.e., has "seen the meaning of the

vehicle"), but has not succeeded in controlling the passions, may through the power of a vow obtain a rebirth in order to practice the Mahāyāna.

We may summarize the categories for whom the *ekayāna* was taught as follows:

I. Those of an indefinite bodhisattva-gotra: they are to be maintained in their practice of the Mahāyāna.

II. Those of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra: they are to be attracted to enter the Mahāyāna.

- A. Those who do not see the meaning of the Mahāyāna: they will eventually enter the Mahāyāna.
- B. Those who see the meaning of the Mahāyāna: they too will enter the Mahāyāna. They are also further subdivided:
  - 1. Those who have not subdued the passions: they will attain a rebirth due to the power of a vow.
  - 2. Those who have subdued the passions: non-returners of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra; they will attain a transformation body.

The next verse (11.58) simply states that both types of śrāvakas who see the meaning of the Mahāyāna (that is, types II.B.1 and II.B.2 from the chart above) advance slowly along the path to supreme awakening because they have the tendency to be content with nirvāṇa. So according to this verse, a preoccupation with nirvāṇa can be a hindrance to the attainment of buddhahood.

The last verse in the section on the *ekayāna* deals with those śrāvakas of an indefinite gotra who have not subdued the passions (type II.B.1). 11.59 and its commentary state:

> so 'kṛtārtho hy abuddhe ca jāto dhyānārtham udyataḥ/
> nirmāṇārthī tad āśritya parāṃ bodhim avāpnute//
>
> tac ca nirmāṇam āśritya krameṇa parāṃ bodhiṃ prāpnoti/ tam avasthā-trayasthaṃ saṃdhāyoktaṃ bhagavatā śrī-mālā-sūtre/ śrāvako bhūtvā pratyekabuddho bhavati punaś ca buddha iti/

> One who has not accomplished the aim, who is born when there is no buddha, and who is intent on the aim of meditation, has need of a transformation. Having recourse to that [transformation body], one attains supreme awakening.
>
> And having recourse to that transformation [body], one attains supreme awakening step by step. With reference to the three stages, in the Śrīmālā-sūtra the blessed one states, 'Having become a śrāvaka, one becomes a pratyekabuddha, and then a buddha.'

The first line of the commentary to 11.59 identifies the subject here as one who has not subdued the passions (*avīta-rāga*), thus it is clear that this verse and its commentary refer to type II.B.1 in the chart above. Here it is stated that one who is born in a period of time in which no buddha exists, and who is intent in the practice of meditation, would have need of a transformation body, through which one could practice the Mahāyāna. The commentary then states that having recourse to that embodiment, one would attain supreme awakening in three stages: first one would become a śrāvaka, then a pratyekabuddha, and finally a buddha. So the attainment of buddhahood for such a person would be a gradual process in which that person progressed through three distinct paths of spiritual attainment. This would seem to imply, then, that in attaining the (inferior) awakening of a śrāvaka, or the (middling) awakening of a pratyekabuddha, one is not thereby excluded from the possibility of ever attaining the complete and perfect awakening of a buddha.

An issue arises, however, with this scheme: having attained the awakening of a śrāvaka, at death one's mental continuum should terminate in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, which as we saw in the discussion of nirvāṇa, is interpreted as a form of non-existence. So if one's mental continuum were terminated, then how would one be able to progress to the stage of a pratyekabuddha or buddha? The text's response is the

one referred to in 11.57 above: those śrāvakas who comprehend the meaning of the Mahāyāna dharma do not attain the utter cessation of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, but rather attain a transformation body, ostensibly in a heavenly abode where a buddha is offering teaching, in order to continue practicing the Mahāyāna and ultimately attain supreme awakening.

It is interesting to note that the commentary to 11.59 refers to the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*, a sūtra that is associated with the *ekayāna*-theory, according to which there is only one efficacious soteriological vehicle.[7] On the MSABh's reading, the *Śrīmālā-sūtra* teaches that beings must gradually progress through the paths of the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha before attaining buddhahood. The MSA/Bh itself, however, states that *some* persons proceed through the stages of a śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha before eventually reaching buddhahood, but it is only śrāvakas of an indefinite gotra who progress through these stages. Others directly enter the bodhisattva-gotra and attain buddhahood. And still others (e.g., those of a definite śrāvaka-gotra) may attain the awakening of a śrāvaka and pass into nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, which is a permanent and final termination of the condition of suffering (rather than a temporary or provisional one). So the MSA/Bh agrees with its interpretation of the *Śrīmālā-sūtra* to the extent that there may be certain restricted cases in which one progresses to supreme awakening step by step. But it does not agree with the sūtra's general *yāna*-theory: while the *Śrīmālā* posits

7. While it may appear that MSABh ad 11.59 offers a direct quote from the *Śrīmālā-sūtra*, Wayman and Wayman (1974: 26) state that the citation does not occur in any extant version of the text. They argue that, instead, it is the MSABh's interpretation of the sūtra's teaching. Lévi (1907: 70) points out that the quote may be found in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.

that there is only one ultimately efficacious soteriological vehicle, the MSA/Bh posits that there are three.

While nearly all of the references to the *ekayāna* in the MSA/Bh occur in these verses (11.53-59), there is one other location in the text where the term is used. Part of the commentary to 12.19 reads:

> aniyata-bhedasyāvaraṇasya pratipakṣa-saṃbhāṣā/ mahāśrāvakāṇāṃ buddhatve vyākaraṇa-deśanā ekayāna-deśanā ca/
>
> Discourse [that functions as] an antidote to the obstruction of belonging to the indefinite category is the teaching of the prophecy of buddhahood for great śrāvakas and the teaching of the one vehicle.

Here it is stated that both the prophecy that certain śrāvakas will attain buddhahood and the *ekayāna*-teaching are antidotes to the obstruction of being in the indefinite category—or of having an indefinite gotra. So again we see that the *ekayāna* was taught in order to attract those of an indefinite śrāvaka-gotra and to maintain those of an indefinite bodhisattva-gotra. Again, a similar point is made in the commentary to 9.8:[8]

> [Buddhahood] protects those of an indefinite gotra from the Hīnayāna by constructing the uniform path of the Mahāyāna.

Causing those whose gotra is indefinite to believe that the Mahāyāna is the only vehicle to salvation, then, protects such persons from falling into the Hīnayāna. These two text-locations serve to reinforce the points that were made in the exegesis of 11.53-59: the *ekayāna* is not definitive in the context of the MSA/Bh; while it may be understood as true in certain restricted senses, it is not actually the case that there is only one efficacious soteriological vehicle. Rather, there are three distinct soteriological vehicles, and the

8. Cited and translated in Chapter 3 of this study.

ekayāna was taught in order to attract śrāvakas and to maintain bodhisattvas in the practice of the Mahāyāna.

Comments on the *ekayāna*-doctrine

In this chapter I have noted a number of times that the *ekayāna* is not taken as definitive (*nītārtha*) in the context of the MSA/Bh. Rather, according to the text, the *ekayāna* was taught in order to accomplish a certain purpose: to attract śrāvakas and to maintain bodhisattvas in the Mahāyāna. This is the purpose of the *ekayāna*-doctrine according to the MSA/Bh. It is interesting to note that the *ekayāna*-doctrine is understood as accomplishing this aim even though (or perhaps because) its meaning is not definitive—that is, even though it is true only in restricted senses. According to the MSA/Bh, there are a few specific senses in which the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna may be thought of as the same: both vehicles lead to liberation, etc. But, from the text's point of view, it is not definitively the case that the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are identical: after all, as we saw in the discussion of the *triyāna*-theory, they are not taken to have the same intent, teaching, support, etc. However, the text implies that there are certain disadvantages to openly declaring the *triyāna*-theory: if certain śrāvakas were to recognize the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna as ultimately distinct, they might doubt the validity of the Mahāyāna and avoid taking up the great vehicle; and if certain bodhisattvas were to realize that the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna were ultimately distinct, they might be tempted to set their sights lower, as it were, and enter the lesser vehicle. So in the interests of soteriological efficacy, the MSA/Bh implies that it is necessary for

some persons to adhere to the non-definitive meaning, rather than to the definitive meaning: it is necessary that some persons focus on the restricted senses in which the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna are the same, rather than on the definitive sense in which they are distinct soteriological vehicles. Thus in the interpretive context of the MSA/Bh, the non-definitive meaning—the meaning that is need of interpretation—may be more soteriologically efficacious than the definitive meaning.

All of this raises some interesting questions about the efficacy of truth and the final intention of the MSA/Bh as a whole. Given the distinction between *nītārtha* and *neyārtha*, between teachings of definitive meaning and those of non-definitive meaning, or between doctrines that are ultimately true and those that are only provisionally true, one might be led to suggest that the MSA/Bh understands the teachings of the Mahāyāna to be *nītārtha*, definitive, and ultimately valid, and the teachings of the Hīnayāna to be *neyārtha*, non-definitive, and only provisionally true. But there is a problem with this interpretive move. The *ekayāna*-doctrine itself, after all, is a Mahāyāna teaching, but it is not understood as definitive according to the text. In fact, as we will see in the chapter on the epistemological implications of the MSA/Bh's soteriological theory, many Mahāyāna doctrines—perhaps all of them—may be understood as provisional, as doctrines taught in order to achieve a certain purpose.

Furthermore, the first half of the opening verse of the MSA (1.1) itself states:

> artha-jño 'rtha-vibhāvanāṃ prakurute vācā padaiś cāmalair
> duḥkhasyottaraṇāya duḥkhita-jane kāruṇyatas tan-mayaḥ/
>
> The one who knows the meaning manifests the meaning with pure speech and words in order to overcome suffering, because he is compassionate and absorbed in [compassion] for those who suffer.

According to this verse we can see that the purpose of the manifestation of the meaning is to overcome suffering (indeed, one interpretation of this verse would be that the very edifice of Buddhism was constructed in order to overcome suffering). The meaning of the doctrine (whether definitive or non-definitive) is taken to be in the service of this aim. The ultimate purpose of the text, then, is not to establish the definitive meaning; rather, it is to overcome suffering, either through leading sentient beings to parinirvāṇa by the śrāvakayāna or the pratyekabuddhayāna, or through guiding sentient beings to buddhahood itself. And it is understood that the aim of overcoming suffering may be accomplished—depending on the context—with teachings that are only provisional, non-definitive, *neyārtha*.

So according to the text we have a distinction between teachings or doctrines which are definitively true and teachings which stand in need of interpretation. But here we should consider again what the MSA/Bh states about reality (*tattva*) at 11.13:

> Reality—which is always non-dual—is the basis of error, is always inexpressible, and does not have the nature of discursivity.

Reality is inexpressible: it does not have the nature of discursivity. This implies that there is no ultimate referent that could clearly adjudicate between definitive and non-definitive truth or meaning. Reality cannot serve as the tribunal because it is utterly inexpressible. In the context of the MSA/Bh, then, perhaps the categories of definitive and non-definitive are not so clearly distinguishable: both are intended to overcome suffering and neither one can ultimately refer to reality itself. So while the MSA/Bh posits that the *ekayāna*-doctrine is intentional and not definitively true, and while it affirms that there are three efficacious soteriological vehicles, perhaps in the end the

MSA/Bh is not so far from the *Laṅkāvatāra* in that sūtra's claim that when there is a transformation of the mind—when reality is realized—there is neither a vehicle nor one who goes by it.[9]

9. See *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* 2.16.204cd (Sanskrit ed., Nanjio 1923: 135): citte tu vai parāvṛtte na yānaṃ na ca yāninaḥ//

Chapter 11
Hīnayāna

Introduction

We have already noted in a previous chapter that while the MSA/Bh ostensibly offers a system of three vehicles, these three vehicles are effectively collapsed into two: the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. In Part II we have also already seen the primary ways in which the MSA/Bh considers the Hīnayāna to be "inferior": it is practiced by those who have an inferior gotra, which means those who have an inferior accumulation of roots of good; it leads only to liberation from the afflictive obstructions, unlike the Mahāyāna, which leads to liberation from both the afflictive and the cognitive obstructions; it terminates in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning, a state which does not allow for the activity of alleviating the suffering of sentient beings; it brings one to a less-than-complete form of awakening in which conceptual discriminations still occur at the level of phenomena; and it does not allow for the attainment of buddhahood, which, as an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance, is coextensive with thusness itself. Thus in the MSA/Bh's scheme of *yāna*s, the Hīnayāna is placed in an inferior position since it leads to goals that are not as comprehensive as those attained by the Mahāyāna.

While I have already clarified the primary means through which the MSA/Bh distinguishes the Mahāyāna from the Hīnayāna, much of this clarification was based on the view that the term *hīnayāna* refers to the śrāvakayāna and the pratyekabuddhayāna. So in many cases, the text-locations on which I based my interpretations did not actually

use the term *hīnayāna*, and instead employed the terms *śrāvakayāna* and/or *pratyekabuddhayāna*, or referred to the attainments of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas. So in this chapter I would like to more closely examine some specific contexts in which the term *hīnayāna* is used by the MSA/Bh, in order to come to a more complete understanding of how the category of the "lesser vehicle" is constructed in the text.

Exegesis of the term *hīnayāna*

One significant way in which the Mahāyāna is distinguished from the Hīnayāna by contemporary scholars of Buddhism is through making reference to their respective canonical literatures. A key factor which separates Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism from other, non-Mahāyāna forms, according to this line of interpretation, is the acceptance of specific sūtras which are designated as characteristically Mahāyāna (such as the *Prajñāpāramitā*-literature, or the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*). In fact much research has focused on the investigation of early Mahāyāna sūtras, in order to identify specific characteristic elements of Mahāyāna thought.

Distinguishing the Mahāyāna from non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism on the basis of literature is not only a move made by scholars of Buddhism. It is not difficult, for example, to find text-locations in early Mahāyāna literature in which sūtras self-consciously describe themselves as Mahāyānist, and set themselves over against non-Mahāyānist beliefs and practices. And as we will further see in the next chapter, the MSA/Bh identifies itself with the Mahāyāna in no uncertain terms. It is after all an "Ornament to the Mahāyāna Sūtras."

In commenting on 11.1, the MSABh makes distinctions among the *piṭaka*s ("baskets" or, less literally, "collections") of Buddhist literature:

> piṭaka-trayaṃ sūtra-vinayābhidharmāḥ/ tad eva trayaṃ hīnayānāgrayāna-bhedena dvayaṃ bhavati/ śrāvaka-piṭakaṃ bodhisattva-piṭakaṃ ca/
>
> There are three collections: sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma. These three are themselves twofold, because of the division between the lesser vehicle [Hīnayāna] and the foremost vehicle [Mahāyāna]: [thus there is] the śrāvaka collection and the bodhisattva collection.

So the MSA/Bh clearly distinguishes the literature of the Hīnayāna from the literature of the Mahāyāna; each one has its own sūtras, vinaya, and abhidharma. Here the text goes on to discuss why there are the three collections of sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma, and it identifies the specific characteristics of each. For example, it states that sūtra brings about certainty of meaning where there is doubt, vinaya indicates the means for avoiding the two extremes of indulging in sensory pleasures or engaging in self-mortification, and abhidharma serves as an antidote to the development of individual views.[1] It also states that sūtra is for the purpose of teaching the meaning of the dharma, vinaya is for the purpose of practicing it, and abhidharma is for the purpose of analyzing it.[2] From these statements it can be seen that primacy of place is given to sūtra-literature: it is sūtra that establishes the meaning of the dharma, which is the basis of both practice and analysis. Although the text does identify specific differences among the three *piṭaka*s, it does not identify any particular differences between the *piṭaka*s of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

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1. MSABh ad 11.1: sūtraṃ . . . tan niścayārthaṃ deśanāt/ anta-dvayānuyoga-pratipakṣeṇa vinayaḥ . . . / svayaṃ dṛṣṭi-parāmarṣa-pratipakṣeṇābhidharmo . . . /.

2. MSABh ad 11.1: punar dharmārtha-deśanā sūtreṇa/ dharmārtha-niṣpattir vinayena . . . / dharmārtha-sāṃkathya-viniścaya-kauśalyam abhidharmeṇeti/.

So while the MSA/Bh does make reference to the existence of differences in Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna literature, this is certainly not the primary mode through which the two vehicles are distinguished. As noted above, the text more clearly separates the vehicles from one another on the basis of their attainments. But one pervasive theme in contemporary interpretations of Buddhism is that in Buddhist thought soteriology is closely related to gnoseology: spiritual attainments are closely related to a correct understanding of the way things really are. In an extended group of verses (11.15-29) the MSA/Bh elucidates its interpretation of a proper ontological understanding, and it relates this understanding to the difference between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

In the first verse of this group (11.15), the text raises the topics of unreal imagination and the error of duality:

> yathā māyā tathābhūta-parikalpo nirucyate/
> yathā māyā-kṛtaṃ tadvat dvaya-bhrāntir nirucyate//
>
> yathā māyā yantra-parigṛhītaṃ bhrānti-nimittaṃ kāṣṭha-loṣṭādikaṃ tathābhūta-parikalpaḥ paratantraḥ svabhāvo veditavyaḥ/ yathā māyā-kṛtaṃ tasyāṃ māyāyāṃ hasty-aśva-suvarṇādy-ākṛtis[3] tad-bhāvena pratibhāsitā tathā tasminn abhūta-parikalpe dvaya-bhrāntir grāhya-grāhakatvena pratibhāsitā parikalpita-svabhāvākārā veditavyā/
>
> Unreal imagination is explained to be just like an illusion. Likewise, the error of duality is explained to be just like the effect of an illusion.
>
> Unreal imagination—the dependent nature—should be known to be just like an illusion—something formed from a piece of wood or a lump of clay, for example, that has the mark of error, and is apprehended through magic. The error of duality—the mode of appearance of the imagined nature, which is manifested as subject and object in that unreal imagination—should be known to be just like the

3. Note that the term *ākṛti* is only used by the text in this group of verses (11.15-29), and has been translated as "appearance," in the sense of "mere appearance." The term *ākāra*, however, is used in a number of places throughout the text, and has been translated as "mode of appearance"; furthermore, while the term *ākṛti* has a negative connotation in the text, *ākāra* has a positive connotation (recall that buddhahood is identified as the attainment of *sarvākāra-jñatā* at MSA 9.2).

> effect of an illusion—the appearance of an elephant, a horse, or gold, for example, in that illusion, which is manifested through the production of that [illusion].

In this verse and commentary unreal imagination (*abhūta-parikalpa*) is said to be like an illusion, while the appearance of duality is said to be like the effect of an illusion. The trope of a magical illusion plays an important role in this group of verses.[4] This trope is used because it allows for an important ontological distinction to be made, the distinction between the dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*) and the imagined nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*). According to the commentary, two aspects of the illusion need to be understood: the illusion itself, and the appearance of unreal objects that are the effect of the illusion. The illusion itself is identified with unreal imagination, which is then equated with the dependent nature. The effect of the illusion (i.e., the appearance of unreal objects) is identified as the error of duality; this is the mistaken construction of the play of appearances into subject (the self or ego) and objects (that which is taken to be external to the self or ego). This construction of appearances into subject and object is equated with the mode of appearance of the imagined nature.

Continuing with the trope of the magical illusion, the next verse in this section (11.16) states:

> yathā tasmin na tad-bhāvaḥ paramārthas tatheṣyate/
> yathā tasyopalabdhis tu tathā saṃvṛti-satyatā//

> The non-existence of the [unreal object] in the [effect of the illusion] should be known as the ultimate [truth]. But the perception of that [unreal object] should be known as the conventional truth.

4. This trope also appear in the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* vv. 27-34; for an edition and translation of this text, see Tola and Dragonetti 1983.

Here the text brings the categories of ultimate truth and conventional truth into the discussion. It states that in ultimate truth, no unreal objects actually exist in the illusion; there is only the appearance of unreal objects. And the perception of those objects of unreal imagination is to be understood as conventional truth. The commentary also states that the duality of the imagined nature does not exist in the dependent nature: although conventionally the dependent nature does appear to have the characteristic of duality, in ultimate truth, the dependent nature is devoid of the duality of the imagined nature.[5]

A later verse (11.19) clarifies the relationship between existence and non-existence:

> tad-ākṛtiś ca tatrāsti tad bhāvaś ca na vidyate/
> tasmād astitva-nāstitvaṃ māyādiṣu vidhīyate//
>
> There the appearance of the [illusion] exists, but the object does not; therefore both existence and non-existence are attributed to illusions, etc.

Here the appearance of the illusion itself is said to be existent, but the objects that appear—the dualistic constructions that are the effect of the illusion—are said to be non-existent. So illusions and other such appearances have the characteristics of both existence and non-existence. The following brief chart summarizes the text's claims regarding unreal imagination and the appearance of duality:

unreal imagination	appearance of duality
metaphorically: the illusion itself	metaphorically: the effect of the illusion
ontologically: the dependent nature	ontologically: the imagined nature
it exists conventionally	it does not exist conventionally (although it appears conventionally)

5. MSABh ad 11.16: . . . tasmin paratantre paramārtha iṣyate parikalpitasya dvaya-lakṣaṇasyābhāvaḥ/.

Again, two aspects are to be distinguished here. There is the occurrence of unreal imagination; unreal imagination does actually exist, just like an illusion itself may be said to exist; and unreal imagination is identified with the dependent nature in the MSA/Bh's tripartite ontological scheme. But there is also the appearance of duality, which is the false construction of unreal imagination into a distinct subject and distinct objects; this duality of subject and object does not actually exist, just as the objects which appear in an illusion do not actually exist; and the appearance of duality is identified with the function of the imagined nature.

Keeping this chart in mind, we may turn to a later verse in this section (11.22) in which the text identifies the relationship between existence and non-existence:

> na bhāvas tatra cābhāvo nābhāvo bhāva eva ca/
> bhāvābhāvāviśeṣaś ca rūpādiṣu vidhīyate//
>
> na bhāvas tatra cābhāvaḥ/ yā dvayābhāsatā/ nābhāvo bhāva eva ca/ yā dvayatā nāstitā/ bhāvābhāvāviśeṣaś ca rūpādiṣu vidhīyate/ ya eva hi dvayābhāsatāyā bhāvaḥ sa eva dvayasyābhāva iti/
>
> There, existence is not non-existence and non-existence is just not existence. The non-distinction of existence and non-existence is attributed to form, etc.
>
> There, existence is not non-existence, since there is the appearance of duality. And non-existence is just not existence, since there is not the reality of duality. The non-distinction of existence and non-existence is attributed to form, etc., because it is just the existence of the appearance of duality that is the non-existence of [any actual] duality.

In this verse existence and non-existence are said to be non-distinct in the case of form and the other aggregates that comprise the psycho-physical organism. As the commentary specifies, form and the other aggregates cannot be said to exist, because in reality there is no dualism: there are not distinct phenomena with essential natures that

may be set over against other distinct phenomena; in ultimate truth, phenomena are not divisible into subject and object. But the aggregates cannot be said to be non-existent, because they do appear in a dualistic manner: the existence of the *appearance* of the aggregates is not called into question. As the commentary states, it is just the existence of the *appearance* of duality that comprises the non-existence of the *reality* of duality.

In the following verse (11.23) the issue of a correct ontological perspective is related to the category of the Hīnayāna:

> samāropāpavādānta[6]-pratiṣedhārtham iṣyate/
> hīnayānena yānasya pratiṣedhārtham eva ca//
>
> . . . abhāvasya hy abhāvatvaṃ viditvā samāropaṃ na karoti/ bhāvasya bhāvatvaṃ viditvāpavādaṃ na karoti/ tayoś cāviśeṣaṃ viditvā na bhāvād udvijate tasmān na hīnayānena niryāti/
>
> This is to be understood for the purpose of avoiding the extremes of imputation and denial, and for the purpose of avoiding going by the Hīnayāna.
>
> . . . Having comprehended the non-existence of that which does not exist, one does not engage in imputation. Having comprehended the existence of that which does exist, one does not engage in denial. And having comprehended the non-distinction of both [existence and non-existence], one is not afraid of existence, and so one does not go out[7] by the Hīnayāna.

Here the MSA/Bh picks up the common Buddhist motif of avoiding the extremes, and applies it to the topic of ontology. The extremes identified in this verse are imputation and denial. Imputation is identified as falsely ascribing existence to something that does not actually exist, while denial is identified as falsely declaring something that exists to

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6. Following Lévi (1911: 111) I am reading *-vādānta-* for *-vādābha-*.

7. Note that in Sanskrit the verbal root here is *nir-yā*, which means "to go out, die, pass away." One sense here, then, is that one who understands the non-distinction of existence and non-existence does not become extinguished through the Hīnayāna.

be non-existent.[8] A correct ontological perspective implies that both of these extremes will be avoided: one will not affirm the existence of the imagined nature, which manifests as the dichotomy of subject and object; and one will not deny the existence of the dependent nature, which is the manifold play of appearances. Furthermore, when one understands that existence and non-existence are not distinct—that the imagined nature is based on the dependent nature—one will not be afraid of existence, and so one will not seek to escape it. Therefore, with a correct conception of the way things really are, one avoids taking up the Hīnayāna.

Another topic I would like to examine is the relationship between the Hīnayāna and the roots of good (*kuśala-mūla*). I have already made reference to the fact that one way the MSA/Bh distinguishes the Hīnayāna from the Mahāyāna is on the basis of their respective gotras, and I have also stated that the śrāvaka- and pratyekabuddha-gotras are based on inferior accumulations of roots of good. The commentary to 15.3-4, however, further specifies that acts associated with the Hīnayāna will have a negative effect on the process of accumulating roots of good:

> viṣādi-sādharmyaṃ hīnayāna-pratisaṃyuktasya karmaṇo hīnayāna-citta-pariṇāmanāt mahāyāne kuśala-mūla-samucchedanāt anutpanna-kuśala-mūlānutpādāya/ utpanna-kuśala-mūlasya dhvaṃsanāt/ buddhatva-saṃpat-prāpti-vibandhanāc ca/
>
> Acts that are associated with the Hīnayāna are like poison, etc., because they turn the mind towards the Hīnayāna, they bring about the utter destruction of roots of good in the Mahāyāna, they prevent the production of roots of good that have not been produced, they result in the destruction of roots of good that have been produced, and they obstruct the obtainment of the perfection that is buddhahood.

8. Although there is no explicit textual evidence here, the position of avoiding the extreme of denial may, in some sense, serve as a criticism of the Madhyamaka view that all phenomena (including appearances themselves) are empty of any form of inherent nature.

In this section acts that are associated with the Hīnayāna are indicated as having certain specific negative results, most of which are related to the category of the roots of good. The commentary states that such acts cause the destruction of roots of good in the Mahāyāna, thus any roots of good associated with the Mahāyāna—or with the attainment of the bodhisattva-gotra—will be destroyed by acts associated with the Hīnayāna. Such acts are also said to prevent the production of further roots of good, and eventually end in the destruction of roots of good that have been produced. This last point was already made in the discussion of nirvāṇa, where I referred to the commentary to 3.3, which states that the roots of good of śrāvakas are not indestructible because they cease in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. From all of this it may be seen that according to the MSA/Bh, engaging in the practice of the Hīnayāna has detrimental effects on the accumulation of roots of good. And as such, the Hīnayāna represents an obstacle to reaching the supreme goal identified in the text: the attainment of buddhahood.

Comments on the category *hīnayāna*

Perhaps the most important point to note here is the way in which soteriological attainment is linked to ontological understanding, specifically in the verses discussed above (11.15-23): the attainments of each vehicle are closely related to that vehicle's view of the way things really are. The ontologies offered by the Hīnayāna and the Mahāyāna certainly differ in some important respects, and according to the MSA/Bh these ontological differences issue in important soteriological differences. From the perspective of the MSA/Bh, we may identify the most important features of Hīnayāna

ontology as: (1) a recognition that persons do not actually exist; the category of the person is taken to be an entirely constructed phenomenon; (2) a clear distinction between the categories of existence and non-existence; and (3) a negative valuation of existence; according to the commentary to 11.23, in the Hīnayāna existence is something to be feared. To elaborate on the MSA/Bh's perspective further, the Hīnayāna views existence and non-existence as mutually exclusive categories: existence is characterized as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and without self, while non-existence is not; thus existence is shunned and non-existence (in the form of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning) is sought. But from the point of view of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna is based on an incorrect ontological perspective and thus leads to a limited soteriological goal: since the Hīnayāna posits a strong distinction between existence and non-existence, and since it gives a negative valuation to existence, it aims to achieve extinction in nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. Since the "lesser vehicle" is purportedly thought to issue in a form of non-existence, one might even say that the MSA/Bh characterizes the Hīnayāna as a form of nihilism.

But in the Mahāyāna, existence and non-existence are not taken to be mutually exclusive. In fact, the text states that they are non-distinct. When this is realized, according to the text, one will not seek an escape from existence and one will avoid taking up the Hīnayāna. The Mahāyāna is understood as based on a correct interpretation of the way things really are, and thus is said to lead to the attainment of buddhahood, described as a state coextensive with reality itself. The Mahāyāna is characterized as moving beyond all dualistic categories, including the categories of existence and non-

existence. So from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna is superior to the Hīnayāna, since the latter vehicle is understood to be caught up in a false ontological dichotomy.

Chapter 12
Mahāyāna

Introduction

Thus far in Parts II and III we have seen how the MSA/Bh constructs a scheme of *yānas* (three *yānas* reduced to two), relates each *yāna* to specific soteriological goals (liberations, forms of nirvāṇa, types of awakening, buddhahood), and orders the *yānas* in a hierarchy (the Mahāyāna as superior to the Hīnayāna in that it leads to the ultimate soteriological goal: buddhahood itself). So the fundamental features of the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory have been identified.

While the Mahāyāna may be defined in terms of the soteriological goals that it leads to, it may also be defined in terms of its characteristic teachings or doctrines. In the context of the MSA/Bh, any list of characteristic teachings would certainly include the following doctrines: the absence of self in both persons and phenomena; the three natures of the imagined, the dependent, and the perfected; representation-only; the non-duality of thusness and buddha-awareness; the store-consciousness; the transformation of the basis; the ten bodhisattva-stages; the six perfections; non-abiding nirvāṇa; and the three embodiments of buddhahood. While I have discussed many of these doctrines in my analysis of the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory, I have not emphasized them as the principal means through which the Mahāyāna is set apart from the Hīnayāna. But this lack of emphasis reflects, I think, a lack of emphasis in the MSA/Bh itself: the text does not identify the Mahāyāna as superior primarily in terms of its comprehensive teachings; it identifies the Mahāyāna as superior primarily in terms of its soteriological attainments.

The text does not offer extended comparative lists of doctrines found in the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, which might then be used to guide a set of arguments aiming to demonstrate the validity and superiority of the doctrines of the Mahāyāna. In fact, in the only section of the text in which extended dialectical arguments are brought to bear (18.82-103), it is to argue for doctrines held in common by both the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.[1]

Again, what does establish the Mahāyāna as the premier Buddhist vehicle according to the MSA/Bh, is that it leads to the most sublime soteriological goal possible: buddhahood. And as I stated earlier, the text assimilates buddhahood to reality itself: buddhahood is equated with thusness (*tathatā*) and the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*). Since it is assimilated to reality, buddhahood becomes nothing less than a metaphysical concept in the MSA/Bh. And since the Mahāyāna leads one to the attainment of that (metaphysical) goal, the Mahāyāna may be interpreted as a metaphysical vehicle: the text presents it as a soteriological vehicle directed towards the attainment of a state coextensive with reality. The Hīnayāna, on the other hand, according to the text, does not lead to the attainment of such a state. Rather, its goals are understood to be more modest: it is said to lead to the termination of the pervasive condition of suffering, which is achieved in the attainment of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning. So again, the MSA/Bh interprets the Hīnayāna as a form of therapy: a release from the condition of suffering. Thus, in the context of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna may be seen as a therapeutic vehicle. And since the Mahāyāna (the metaphysical vehicle) is said to have a

1. MSA/Bh 18.82-91 argue for the doctrine of momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*). and 18.92-103 argue for the doctrine of the absence of self in persons (*pudgala-nairātmya*).

more comprehensive objective than the more limited Hīnayāna (the therapeutic vehicle), the Mahāyāna is understood to be the premier Buddhist vehicle.

In this chapter I will further elucidate some points that the MSA/Bh makes about the Mahāyāna. Specifically, I will focus on the text's usage of the term *mahāyāna* in two contexts: contexts in which the Mahāyāna is somehow defined by the text, and contexts in which the Mahāyāna is defended from its (Hīnayānist) detractors. Examining these contexts will help to more clearly illuminate the way in which the Mahāyāna is understood in the MSA/Bh.

Exegesis of the *mahāyāna*

One feature that is often picked out as distinctive about the Mahāyāna is that it aims for the salvation of both oneself and others, while the Hīnayāna purportedly aims only for the salvation of oneself. This theme is certainly brought up in the MSA/Bh.[2] In fact the text states that the very purpose of the Mahāyāna is the benefit of others.[3] But what exactly is the Mahāyāna? How is it defined by the text?

There are three locations in which the text identifies, defines, or summarizes what it means by the term *mahāyāna*. The first of these locations occurs in the chapter on the perfections (MSA, Chapter 16). 16.5 and its commentary state:

> bhogeṣu cānabhiratis tīvrā gurutā dvaye akhedaś ca/
> yogaś ca nirvikalpaḥ samas tam idam uttamaṃ yānaṃ//

2. Specifically at MSABh ad 1.10 and ad 10.13. The importance of the benefit of others in general, however, is reiterated many times in the text.

3. MSABh ad 3.12: para-hita-kriyārtham ukte vistīṃe mahāyāna-dharme . . . /.

> dānena bodhisattvasya bhogeṣv anabhiratir[4] nirapekṣatvāt/ śīla-samādānena bodhisattva-śikṣāsu tīvrā gurutā/ kṣāntyā vīryeṇa cākhedo dvaye yathā-kramaṃ duḥkhe ca sattvāsattva-kṛte kuśala-prayoge ca/ dhyāna-prajñāyāṃ nirvikalpo yogaḥ śamatha-vipaśyanā-saṃgṛhītaḥ/
>
> Not delighting in pleasures, great respect, not having lassitude in either, and non-conceptually-discriminative yoga: this is equivalent to the ultimate vehicle.
>
> Through giving, a bodhisattva—due to desirelessness—does not delight in pleasures. Through resolve in morality, there is great respect towards the training of a bodhisattva. Through patience and energy, there is not lassitude, respectively, either in suffering—which may be produced by both sentient and insentient beings—or in applying oneself to what is good. Through meditation and wisdom, there is non-conceptually-discriminative yoga, which is comprised of calming and insight.

This verse and its commentary appear in a section of the text that discusses why there are six perfections. It should be noted that here the verse uses the term "ultimate vehicle" (*uttama-yāna*), a synonym for the Mahāyāna.[5] The text summarizes the Mahāyāna as being comprised of four things: not delighting in pleasures, which corresponds to the perfection of giving (*dāna*); having great respect, which corresponds to the perfection of morality (*śīla*); not having lassitude, which corresponds to patience and energy (*kṣānti* and *vīrya*); and cultivating non-conceptually-discriminative yoga, which corresponds to meditation and wisdom (*dhyāna* and *prajñā*). Thus here the Mahāyāna is not identified by characteristic doctrines, but rather by characteristic practices: it is the practice of the perfections which distinguishes the Mahāyāna from the Hīnayāna and identifies it as a distinct soteriological vehicle.

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4. Following Lévi (1911: 177) and the verse-text itself, I am reading *anabhiratir* for *abhiratir*.

5. MSABh ad 1.1 also uses the term *uttama-yāna*. Other terms used by the text to refer to the Mahāyāna are *agra-yāna* (foremost vehicle; MSABh ad 12.17) and *anuttara-yāna* (excellent vehicle; MSABh ad 14.37–41).

The second location in which the text identifies or defines what it means by the term *mahāyāna* occurs in the chapter on virtues (MSA, Chapter 19). 19.59-60 address why the "great vehicle" is known as "great":

> ālambana-mahatvaṃ ca pratipatter dvayos tathā/
> jñānasya vīryārambhasya upāye kauśalasya ca//
>
> udāgama-mahatvaṃ ca mahatvaṃ buddha-karmaṇaḥ/
> etan-mahatva-yogād dhi mahāyānaṃ nirucyate//
>
> Greatness of basis and of the practice of both, of knowledge, of exertion of energy, and of skill in means.
>
> Greatness of attainment and greatness of the acts of a buddha: due to the greatness of these it is known as the great vehicle.

The commentary specifies that the term *mahāyāna* is used due to seven greatnesses. The greatness of basis refers to the extensiveness of the Mahāyāna dharma (the great number and great length of its sūtras, etc.). The greatness of practice means that the Mahāyāna is practiced for the benefit of both oneself and others. The greatness of knowledge refers to the knowledge of the absence of self in both persons and phenomena. The greatness of exertion of energy refers to the time required to attain buddhahood: three incalculable aeons. The greatness of skill in means refers to the absence of defilements even without abandoning saṃsāra.[6] The greatness of attainment means acquiring the qualities exclusive to buddhas. And the greatness of the acts of a buddha refers to a buddha's manifestation of complete awakening and parinirvāṇa.

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6. MSA/Bh 18.69-70 discuss skill in means (*upāya-kauśalya*). The text identifies five types of skill in means: non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*); the four articles of attraction by which a bodhisattva draws sentient beings (*catvāri saṃgraha-vastūni*) (on these see Edgerton 1970, vol. 2: 548); confession, thanks, request, and maturation (*pratideśanā, anumodanā, adhyeṣaṇā, pariṇāmanā*); concentrations and formulae (*samādhi, dhāraṇī*); and non-abiding nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*).

The final location in which the text specifies what it means by the term *mahāyāna* occurs in the two verses following the ones just discussed. 19.61-62 are introduced as verses on the analysis of the summary of the Mahāyāna (*mahāyāna-saṃgraha*):

> gotraṃ dharmādhimuktiś ca cittasyotpādanā tathā/
> dānādi-pratipattiś ca nyāmāvakrāntir[7] eva ca//
>
> sattvānāṃ paripākaś ca kṣetrasya ca viśodhanā/
> apratiṣṭhita-nirvāṇaṃ bodhiḥ śreṣṭhā ca darśanā[8]//
>
> Gotra, inclination towards the dharma, and the production of thought, the practice of giving [and the other perfections], and also taking a vow.
>
> The maturation of sentient beings, the purification of a field, non-abiding nirvāṇa, supreme awakening, and manifesting.

In these two verses the Mahāyāna is summarized in terms of ten aspects. The first of these, gotra, has already been discussed at length in a previous chapter. The second, inclination towards the dharma, is treated in the tenth chapter of the MSA. In that chapter, the text identifies three results of having an inclination towards the Mahāyāna: immense merit, an increase in inclination towards the dharma, and buddhahood.[9] The next aspect, the production of thought, refers to the production of the thought of awakening, which must precede the process of taking up the path to buddhahood. Next is the practice of the perfections. We have already seen above that at 16.5 the text identifies the Mahāyāna with the practice of the perfections. The fifth aspect is taking a vow,

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7. Following Lévi (1911: 281) I am reading *nyāmāvakrāntir* for *nyāyāvakrāntir*. The term *nyāma* is equivalent to *niyama*, which means "vow."

8. Following Lévi (1911: 281) I am reading *darśanā* for *darśanāt*.

9. MSABh ad 10.14: vipula-puṇya-vṛddhiṃ tasyā evādhimukter vṛddhiṃ tad-dhetukāṃ cātulya-guṇa-mahātmatāṃ buddhatvaṃ/

which ostensibly refers to taking the bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings. The sixth aspect is the maturation of sentient beings, the topic of MSA, Chapter 8. The seventh aspect of the Mahāyāna is the purification of the field, which refers to the process through which a bodhisattva purifies a particular world-realm so that upon the attainment of buddhahood, that world-realm may be converted into a buddha-field. The eighth, ninth, and tenth aspects—non-abiding nirvāṇa, supreme awakening, and manifesting as a buddha—have already been discussed in the chapters, respectively, on nirvāṇa, awakening, and buddhahood.

The commentary to this verse specifies that the maturation of sentient beings occurs on the first through the seventh bodhisattva-stages; the purification of the field and non-abiding nirvāṇa occur on the eight through the tenth bodhisattva-stages; and the attainment of supreme awakening and manifesting as a buddha occur on the stage of buddhahood (which follows the tenth bodhisattva-stage). The first five aspects of the Mahāyāna (attainment of a gotra through taking the bodhisattva vow) are not specified in terms of their corresponding bodhisattva-stages, so it may be inferred that they are to be taken up before formally entering the bodhisattva-stages.

Although not specifically mentioned in the MSA/Bh itself, Yogācāra texts typically employ a set of categories to identify the forms of spiritual training that a bodhisattva must cultivate. This set of categories, known as the *śikṣālambana*, or the bases of training, may be viewed as a kind of résumé of the Mahāyāna because it specifies the types of training necessary for the attainment of the perfect awakening of buddhahood. The *śikṣālambana*s are specifically mentioned by both Sthiramati and

Asvabhāva in their introductions to MSA, Chapter 9.[10] In the MSAT, Asvabhāva offers a list of seven bases of training, which corresponds to the list given by the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* offered here (Sanskrit ed., Dutt 1966: 15): (1) one's own benefit (*svārtha*), (2) the benefit of others (*parārtha*), (3) the meaning of reality (*tattvārtha*), (4) power (*prabhāva*), (5) the maturation of sentient beings (*sattva-paripāka*), (6) the maturation of the qualities of a buddha in oneself (*ātmano buddha-dharma-paripāka*), and (7) unexcelled, perfect awakening (*anuttarā samyak-saṃbodhi*). In the MSAVBh, however, Sthiramati offers a condensed list of five bases of training: (1) one's own benefit and the benefit of others, (2) the meaning of reality, (3) power, (4) maturation, and (5) perfect awakening. Note that if elements (1) and (4) in Sthiramati's list were each divided into two, his list would be equivalent to the standard sevenfold list. Griffiths (1990b: 49) has noted that the titles of Chapters 5-9 of the MSA correspond to the standard list of seven *śikṣālambanas*. Thus the structure of that part of the text may itself be viewed as a kind of résumé of the Mahāyāna.

At this point it would be useful to list the various summaries of the Mahāyāna discussed thus far in order to view their similarities and differences. On the following page is a table summarizing these interpretations according to the sources and text-locations discussed above.

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10. See DT sems tsam MI 66a1ff. and DT sems tsam BI 105b5ff., respectively. On the *śikṣālambanas* in these texts, also see Nguyen 1990: 467, note 3, and Griffiths 1990b: 49, note 36.

Table 1: Summaries of the Mahāyāna according to the MSA and its commentaries

MSA Chaps. 2-10	MSAT's *śikṣālambanas*	MSAVBh's list	MSA 19.59-60	MSA 19.60-61	MSA 16.5
2 Going for refuge					
3 Gotra				Gotra	
4 Production of thought				Production of thought	
5 Practice (MSA 5.2: benefit of oneself and others)	One's own benefit; Benefit of others	One's own/ others' benefit	Greatness of practice (benefit of oneself and others)	Practice of perfections	Perfections
6 Reality	Meaning of reality	Meaning of reality	Greatness of knowledge (absence of self in persons and phenomena: MSABh ad 6.3-4)		
7 Power	Power	Power	Greatness of attainment (powers of a buddha)	Purification of buddha-field (topic of MSA 7.7)	
8 Maturation	Maturation of sentient beings; Maturation of buddha-dharmas	Maturation	Greatness of energy; Greatness of skill in means (for maturation of beings)	Maturation of sentient beings	
9 Awakening (or buddhahood)	Awakening	Awakening	Greatness of acts of a buddha (manifesting awakening and nirvāṇa)	Awakening; Non-abiding nirvāṇa; Manifesting as a buddha	
10 Inclination				Inclination	

Through this chart we can note a number of points regarding the various summaries of the Mahāyāna. Two of the elements from the lists (viz., greatness of basis from MSA 19.59-60, and taking a vow from MSA 19.60-61) do not correspond to any element in any other list. And some of the elements on a list do not precisely correspond to other elements; for example, the greatnesses of energy and of skill in means from MSA 19.59-60 do not exactly correspond to the maturation of sentient beings; nevertheless, I think it is quite clear that the purpose of developing great energy and skill in means is to bring sentient beings to maturity. But while there is certainly no definitive or essential list of elements that comprise the Mahāyāna according to the MSA and its commentaries, we can see that many of the lists share the common core that makes up Chapters 5 through 9 of the verse-text. Thus we might say that the MSA/Bh posits that these five categories of practice are fundamental to the Mahāyāna. Again, these five categories are: practices for the benefit of both oneself and others, the realization of the meaning of reality, the acquisition of powers specific to bodhisattvas and/or buddhas, the maturation of sentient beings and of the buddha-dharmas, and the attainment of perfect awakening. Therefore if we were to attempt to derive a definition of the Mahāyāna from the MSA/Bh in terms of its practices, then one route would be to define the Mahāyāna in terms of the standard list of the bases of training (*śikṣālambana*) found in many Yogācāra texts.

In the introduction to this chapter, I mentioned that there were two specific contexts in which I would be examining the use of the term *mahāyāna* in the MSA/Bh: contexts in which the Mahāyāna is somehow defined by the text, and contexts in which the Mahāyāna is defended from its (Hīnayānist) detractors. Since the definition of the

Mahāyāna has already been discussed, I will now move on to consider arguments offered by the text in defense of the Mahāyāna. As I stated in the general introduction, it should be kept in mind that the Mahāyāna arose in a context in which it represented a number of innovations to already established Buddhist doctrines and practices. As such, it was necessary for the Mahāyāna to justify itself as properly belonging within the fold of standard Buddhist discourse and practice.

A significant part of the first chapter of the MSA/Bh is devoted to Mahāyāna apologetics.[11] The first set of arguments in defense of the Mahāyāna occurs at 1.7.[12] When a hypothetical opponent is said to declare that the Mahāyāna is not the word of the buddha, the verse-text responds that it is indeed the word of the buddha:

> ādāv avyākaraṇāt sama-pravṛtter agocarāt siddheḥ/
> bhāvābhāve 'bhāvāt pratipakṣatvād rutānyatvāt//
>
> Because of the absence of a prophecy at the beginning, because of simultaneous origin, because [it is] beyond the scope, because of attainment, because of the impossibility of existence and non-existence, because [it has] the characteristic of an antidote, and because it is not literal.

Through this set of seven arguments, the MSA/Bh argues that the Mahāyāna should be accepted as the word of the buddha (*buddha-vacana*).[13] In the paragraphs that follow, I will deal with each of these arguments individually.

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11. MSA 1.7-21 (the end of the chapter). As noted in Chapter 2, these verses constitute an independent chapter in the Derge Tanjur edition of the text.

12. Davidson (1990: 309-312) has also discussed these arguments; he states, "The general outline for the Mahāyāna apology was established by the author of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*; most later authors echoed or elaborated the same concerns." I do not know to what extent this is true, but again it seems likely that the text, at least in parts, is almost certainly drawing from prior sources.

13. Cabezón (1992) discusses arguments made in the *Vyākhyāyukti* which are directed towards establishing the same point.

(1) The first argument offered in defense of the Mahāyāna is that the buddha did not give any prophecy regarding the danger of some false teaching arising in the future: if it were the case that some counterfeit teaching would arise, the buddha would have warned against it. In response to this argument, the Hīnayānist might say that the buddha was indifferent to the future and therefore did not give any warning. But 1.8 responds that it is implausible to believe that buddhas would be indifferent with regard to the status of their teaching in the future, because they are able to see things immediately, they are the protectors of the dharma, and their knowledge is not limited by time.[14]

(2) The second argument given is that the Mahāyāna and the śrāvakayāna originated simultaneously: the Mahāyāna did not come later than the śrāvakayāna; therefore it does not represent some sort of apocryphal innovation. The Mahāyāna was being taught to bodhisattvas at the same time as the śrāvakayāna was being taught to śrāvakas.

(3) The third argument offered is a response to the charge that the Mahāyāna was an invention of non-Buddhist heretics. The MSA/Bh states that the Mahāyāna is beyond the scope of logical analysis and, therefore, could not have been devised by non-Buddhist heretics. At 1.12 the MSA further develops the point that the Mahāyāna is beyond the scope of logical analysis. The verse states:

> niśrito 'niyato 'vyāpī sāṃvṛtaḥ khedavān api/
> bālāśrayo matas tarkas tasyāto viṣayo na tat//

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14. MSA 1.8: pratyakṣa-cakṣuṣo buddhāḥ śāsanasya ca rakṣakāḥ/ adhvany-anāvṛta-jñānā upekṣāto na yujyate//.

> Logic, properly considered, is dependent, is not fixed, is not comprehensive, is conventional, is exhaustible, and has a basis that is undeveloped; hence the [Mahāyāna] is not within its scope.

The first point this verse makes is that logic is dependent and is not fixed, which means that it is dependent upon certain traditions and thus is understood differently at different times. Nor is logic comprehensive since it does not examine all objects of knowledge; rather it adheres only to conventional truth; and so logic is exhaustible because its does not range over all objects. The Mahāyāna, on the other hand, is not based on certain traditions, is concerned with all objects of knowledge, both conventional and ultimate, and is not exhaustible because of the great number of Mahāyāna sūtras. Thus the Mahāyāna is not within the scope of logic. And since it is not within the scope of logic, its nature is entirely different from that of the teachings of the heretics. Therefore, the Mahāyāna should not be falsely ascribed to heretics; rather, it should be accepted as the word of the buddha.

(4) The next argument is a response to the charge that the Mahāyāna was not taught by Śākyamuni, but rather by another teacher who passed through the various stages to buddhahood. In response to this, the MSA/Bh states that one who has passed through the various stages to buddhahood and has taught the dharma is, by definition, a buddha. Thus, even if the Mahāyāna had been taught by a buddha other than Śākyamuni, it would still be the word of the buddha. Thus the level of attainment of the teacher establishes the Mahāyāna as properly Buddhist.

(5) The fifth argument in defense of the Mahāyāna is perhaps the most interesting one because it forces the Hīnayānist opponent to consider the status of the Hīnayāna

itself. The argument states that it is impossible that the śrāvakayāna exists but that the Mahāyāna does not exist. In order for the śrāvakayāna to exist, there must have been a buddha to teach it. But in order for a buddha to come into being, there must have been some vehicle through which that buddha attained buddhahood (i.e., there must have been some *buddhayāna* or Mahāyāna). Thus if the śrāvakayāna is to be accepted as the word of the buddha, then the Mahāyāna must also be accepted as the word of the buddha. In response to this argument, the Hīnayānist might agree that there must be a Mahāyāna in order for buddhas to attain buddhahood, but then argue that the śrāvakayāna itself should be regarded as the Mahāyāna. At 1.9 the MSA/Bh deals with this response by stating that the śrāvakayāna cannot be thought of as the Mahāyāna because it does not teach the benefit of others, because it aims for the parinirvāṇa of oneself rather than for the perfect awakening of a buddha, and because it lacks the means and teachings for the attainment of buddhahood.[15] So since there must be a vehicle for buddhas, since the śrāvakayāna cannot be taken to be that vehicle, and since there is no other alternative candidate, the Mahāyāna should be accepted as the *buddhayāna*.

(6) The next argument defends the Mahāyāna on the basis of its spiritual effects. It states that the Mahāyāna is an antidote to the defilements, since it is the basis of all forms of non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*). And since it is an antidote to the defilements, it should be regarded as the word of the buddha. This argument

15. MSA 1.9: vaikalyato virodhād anupāyatvāt tathāpy anupadeśāt/ na śrāvakayānam idaṃ bhavati mahāyāna-dharmākhyaṃ//.

proceeds from a broad definition of the word of the buddha: anything that causes the defilements to decrease is to be thought of as the word of the buddha.

(7) The final argument states that the Mahāyāna should be accepted as the word of the buddha because its meaning is not literal. According to this argument, the meaning of the Mahāyāna is subtle, and therefore its teachings are not to be taken literally. Thus it would be inappropriate to conclude that the Mahāyāna was not the word of the buddha on the basis of considering only the literal meaning of Mahāyāna teachings.

The next set of arguments in defense of the Mahāyāna occurs at 1.11. Here the hypothetical Hīnayānist opponent argues that a teaching is to be accepted as the word of the buddha if it appears in the sūtras, is observed in the vinaya, and does not contradict reality (*dharmatā*).[16] And the fundamental Mahāyāna teaching that all phenomena are without nature (*sarva-dharma-niḥsvabhāvatva*) does not possess the three indicators identifying it as the word of the buddha since, ostensibly, that teaching does not appear in the sūtras or the vinaya, and since it contradicts reality. In response to this objection, 1.11 states:

> svake 'vatārāt svasyaiva vinaye darśanād api/
> audāryād api gāmbhīryād aviruddhaiva dharmatā//
>
> Because it appears in its own [sūtras], because it is seen in its own vinaya, and because it is sublime and profound, it does not contradict reality.

The text's response to the Hīnayānist opponent's argument, then, is that the Mahāyāna does indeed bear all three indicators identifying it as the word of the buddha. The

16. On these three indicators see Lamotte 1983/1984, especially: 10-13.

teachings of the Mahāyāna do appear in the sūtras; i.e., the teaching that all phenomena are without nature appears in numerous Mahāyāna sūtras. This argument implies that it is not reasonable to claim that a teaching must appear in some particular sūtra in order to be accepted as the word of the buddha, since specific sūtras differ from one sect to another. Thus, in order for them to be accepted, it is sufficient that the teachings of the Mahāyāna appear in some sūtra or sūtras (e.g., in those of the Mahāyāna). Furthermore, the Mahāyāna teaching also conforms to its own vinaya. The commentary states that for a bodhisattva, the primary affliction is conceptual discrimination (*vikalpa*). Thus insofar as the claim "all phenomena are without nature" teaches one to avoid conceptual discrimination, it adheres to the vinaya of the Mahāyāna. And finally, the claim that all phenomena are without nature does not contradict reality, since reality consists in the attainment of perfect awakening, and since the Mahāyāna leads to perfect awakening. Thus the Mahāyāna possesses all three indicators of appearing in the sūtras, conforming to the vinaya, and not contradicting reality.

The next set of arguments takes a different approach to apologetics. Rather than directly arguing in defense of the Mahāyāna, the last section of MSA, Chapter 1, is primarily concerned with explaining why one might fear the Mahāyāna teaching, or not be inclined towards it, and whether such fears are reasonable. 1.14 states:

> tad-asthāna-trāso bhavati jagatāṃ dāha-karaṇo
> mahāpuṇya-skandha-prasava-karaṇād dīrgha-samayaṃ/
> agotro 'san-mitro 'kṛta-matir apūrvācita-śubhas
> trasaty asmin dharme patati mahato 'rthād gata iha//
>
> Those who inappropriately fear the [Mahāyāna] will experience suffering due to the accumulation of a mass of significant demerits over a long period of time.

> Those who have no gotra [or] no true friend, those whose minds are undeveloped, [and] those who have not previously accumulated purity: [such persons] fear this dharma. Here they fall away from the great benefit.

In this verse, four causes of being fearful of the Mahāyāna are identified: having no gotra; having no true friend who may direct one towards the dharma; having a mind which is undeveloped in the Mahāyāna teaching; and not having previously acquired any purity. If one is lacking all four of these, then that person will have no inclination towards the Mahāyāna, and will even be fearful of it. The result of such fearfulness, according to the text, is that one will acquire substantial demerits, which will result in births in negative states of existence. It is interesting to note that here the category of gotra serves to explain why someone would (or would not) be drawn towards the Mahāyāna. Thus we can see gotra functioning as a spiritual-potentiality theory: it identifies the categories to which sentient beings belong, and the soteriological possibilities of each category.

In the next verse (1.15), the text explains why it is inappropriate to be fearful of the Mahāyāna teaching:

> tad-anyānyābhāvāt parama-gahanatvād anugamāt
> vicitrasyākhyānād dhruva-kathana-yogād bahu-mukhāt/
> yathākhyānaṃ nārthād bhagavati ca bhāvātigahanāt
> na dharme 'smiṃs trāso bhavati viduṣāṃ yoni-vicayāt//

> Because there is not another which is different from it, because of the profundity of its excellence, because it conforms, because it expresses a variety, because it expresses what is constant through many entrances, because the meaning is not literal, and because the existence of the blessed one is quite impenetrable, the wise should not fear this dharma, due to investigating its source.

Here the verse-text offers seven reasons for not fearing the Mahāyāna teaching. (1) The first reason, because there is not another which is different from it, indicates that there is

no other Mahāyāna, and that those who practice the vehicles of the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas should themselves enter the Mahāyāna, since everyone should become a buddha. (2) The next reason, because of the profundity of its excellence, indicates that the Mahāyāna follows the path of omniscience (*sarva-jña-jñāna*), which cannot be achieved through the Hīnayāna. (3) The third reason, because it conforms, indicates that the Mahāyāna developed at the same time as the Hīnayāna. (4) The next reason is that it expresses a variety of paths of accumulation (*saṃbhāra-mārga*), which as we saw in the chapter on *vimukti*, is the first of the five paths of attainment. (5) The following reason, because it has various entrances, indicates that the Mahāyāna teaches the doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in different ways in different sūtras; so even if it is not understood in one way, it may be understood in another. (6) The sixth reason, because the meaning is not literal, was already discussed in the exegesis of MSA 1.7. (7) And the final reason is that the existence of the buddha is impenetrable and difficult to perceive; thus even if others cannot fully understand the existence of a buddha, this is no reason to be fearful.

The final apology for the Mahāyāna occurs in 1.16 and 1.19-21.[17] The basic point of this argument is that one who does not fully understand the Mahāyāna teachings is in no position to ascertain whether they should be accepted as the word of the buddha. The commentary to 1.16 states that one would only be able to determine whether the Mahāyāna is the word of the buddha if one were to have the awareness of liberation (*vimukti-jñāna*). Thus only through attaining liberation can one truly ascertain what

17. MSA 1.17 again takes up the theme of being fearful of the dharma, and 1.18 discusses why one would lack inclination towards the Mahāyāna. MSA 1.18 reiterates points made at MSA 1.14.

qualifies as the word of the buddha. 1.19 states that it is inappropriate to criticize sūtras that have not been heard, and 1.20 points out that it is inappropriate to imagine the meaning of Mahāyāna teachings to be literal. 1.21 concludes the defense of the Mahāyāna by stating that, in the case of those who do not truly understand the meaning of the Mahāyāna, it is better for them to remain indifferent towards it than to doubt it: indifference towards the Mahāyāna is not a fault, but doubt is.[18]

Regarding the variety of arguments the MSA/Bh employs in its apology for the Mahāyāna, it is worth noting that not all of the arguments carry out the same function. Many of the text's arguments serve as counter-arguments to objections raised from the perspective of a Hīnayānist; for example, arguments (1) through (4) from 1.7, and the arguments from 1.11. Such arguments attempt to demonstrate that there are reasonable responses to possible Hīnayāna criticisms of the Mahāyāna. Other arguments, however, are more aggressive in nature, and set out to actively demonstrate that the Mahāyāna is superior to the Hīnayāna; for example, the arguments from 1.7 that posit the superiority of the Mahāyāna based on its supposed priority to the śrāvakayāna (5) and based on its effectiveness as an antidote to the defilements (6). A different type of argument may be seen at 1.14, which attempts to explain the problem of why everyone is not a Mahāyānist; here the text is addressing secondary problems that might be raised given the existence of the Mahāyāna. Thus different arguments in the text can be seen to carry out different functions. Nevertheless, based on function alone, it would be difficult to determine

18. MSA 1.21cd: prāgeva saṃdeha-gatasya dharme tasmād upekṣaiva varaṃ hy adoṣā//.

whether the MSA/Bh's arguments in defense of the Mahāyāna were intended for a Hīnayānist or Mahāyānist audience. What can be reasonably concluded, however, is that the audience for which the apology was composed may be broadly described as Buddhist: all of the MSA/Bh's arguments in defense of the Mahāyāna employ Buddhist concepts and categories to a significant extent. Thus they would be unconvincing to those not within the fold of some broadly defined interpretation of Buddhism.

Comments on the category *mahāyāna*

As Ruegg points out (1969: 177), many Tibetan commentators specify that the different vehicles of Buddhism may be defined in terms of their basis (*gzhi*), path (*lam*), and result (*'bras bu*). Here we have examined different ways in which the Mahāyāna is identified, defined, or summarized, and distinguished from the Hīnayāna. If defined in terms of its basis (*gzhi*), the Mahāyāna would be identified in terms of its philosophical basis or characteristic doctrines, such as the absence of self in both persons and phenomena, the three natures, etc. In the introduction to this chapter, I provided a partial list of such characteristic Mahāyāna doctrines that appear in the MSA/Bh. If defined in terms of its path (*lam*), the Mahāyāna might be delineated in the MSA/Bh in terms of the set of practices known as the bases of training (*śikṣālambanas*). Alternatively, the Mahāyāna might also be specified in terms of the ten bodhisattva-stages, or in terms of the fivefold paths of accumulation, application, vision, cultivation, and completion (*saṃbhāra*, *prayoga*, *darśana*, *bhāvanā*, *niṣṭhā*), discussed in the chapter on *vimukti*. And if defined in terms of its results (*'bras bu*), the Mahāyāna would be defined in the

MSA/Bh in terms of the attainments of liberation from both cognitive and afflictive obstructions, non-abiding nirvāṇa, perfect awakening, and buddhahood—a state understood to be coextensive with reality itself. Thus the Mahāyāna has been identified in terms of all three standard modes of basis, path, and result.

In the introduction to this chapter, I noted that since the Mahāyāna is understood to issue in a state that is coextensive with reality itself (i.e., buddhahood), it may be thought of as a metaphysical vehicle. And the Hīnayāna, since it is understood to serve only as a termination of the pervasive condition of suffering, may be considered a therapeutic vehicle. In Parts II and III, I have provided an exegesis of the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction: I have identified the vehicles, explained how they are defined by the text, specified the goals each is said to issue in, and discussed how those goals are defined by the text. All of this, however, was preliminary to my primary aim, which is to analyze the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction as it is constructed by the MSA/Bh. In Part IV I will turn to this task, and analyze this distinction in terms of some relevant ontological, epistemological, and soteriological considerations.

Part IV
Analysis of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna Distinction

Chapter 13
Ontological considerations

Introduction

Part IV is devoted to providing an analysis of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction constructed by the MSA/Bh. This analysis will be in three chapters. This first chapter will look at the distinction in terms of some relevant ontological considerations, the second will examine the distinction from the point of view of some epistemological issues, and the third will approach the distinction in terms of a fundamental soteriological concern—that is, in terms of a tension between two basic conceptions of soteriology that may be seen in aspects of Indian Buddhist thought. The analysis of the MSA/Bh's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction is divided into three separate chapters because my objective is not to provide a unified and complete account of the difference between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna (I doubt that such an account would be either possible or desirable, in any case); rather, my purpose is to trace out some of the more salient implications of the text's Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction. The three particular lines of ontological, epistemological, and soteriological analysis were chosen because they represent, I think, concerns that are central to the text as a whole. That is to say, the text has much to say about what reality is, how it is to be known, and how it may be attained. My hopes are that it will be in some way illuminating to see how the MSA/Bh's distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna relates to these concerns.

In that it deals with the implications of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, this part of the dissertation will necessarily be more interpretive than the previous two parts.

Part II—on soteriological terms—and Part III—on soteriological vehicles—were more exegetically oriented since their aim was to analyze specific terms appearing in the MSA/Bh. Thus in the chapters comprising those parts I focused on elucidating claims explicitly made by the text (although I began to trace out lines of interpretation in the closing comments of each chapter). Here in Part IV, while I will certainly be looking at claims specifically made by the MSA/Bh, I ultimately hope to shed light on issues that are not directly addressed by the text itself. (For example, the text does not discuss the issue of how its general ontological claims relate to the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction.) Since I will be analyzing issues not explicitly dealt with in the MSA/Bh, my approach here in Part IV will involve moving more clearly beyond what the text itself states, and more deeply into the realm of what it implies.

In this move away from the explicit and towards the implicit, a significant issue arises which merits further consideration. As I remarked in Chapter 2, the MSA/Bh is a less than systematic text. Although the text is broad-ranging in its claims, it is not immediately concerned with making all of those claims neatly cohere with one another to form an entirely consistent, interdependent system of ideas. As Davidson has remarked (1985: 262), the MSA/Bh employs a wide variety of different terminologies, and it is not always clear how these terminologies are to be related to one another. Nevertheless, as I discussed in the introduction, I think the MSA/Bh is best understood as a text primarily concerned with conceptual questions, specifically with questions that arise out of reflections on the practice of the Mahāyāna. So on my reading, the MSA/Bh is deeply concerned with issues such as the nature of reality and the nature of specific

soteriological goals. Thus we are not wandering too far afield in considering the implications of various terms, concepts, and categories at work in the text, because in so doing we might better understand both the meanings and the ramifications of such terms, concepts, and categories. But again it should be emphasized that in drawing out these implications, I am necessarily taking a more interpretive approach to the text, especially since the text is not explicitly concerned with tracing out entirely consistent theoretical implications for the various terminologies and models of reality that it employs.

In this chapter I will focus on the following two questions. (1) What are the most significant ontological claims made by the MSA/Bh? And (2) how do these ontological claims imply or allow for a system of two final soteriological vehicles (the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna) which terminate in two distinct soteriological goals (respectively, buddhahood and nirvāṇa without residual conditioning)?[1] In addressing these questions, I will also discuss related issues, such as the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the three natures, the text's view of the ground of awakening, and whether the text should be considered to uphold some form of metaphysical idealism.

Ultimate reality

As noted in previous chapters, there are a number of terms that the MSA/Bh employs in order to refer to reality in the ultimate sense; that is to say, reality as it actually or truly is, as opposed to reality as it appears or as it is constructed by

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1. The concerns in this chapter have been influenced by Ruegg's analysis of the relationship between *gotra*, *tathāgatagarbha*, and the *ekayāna* in his study *La Théorie du Tathāgatagarbha et du Gotra* (1969).

conceptualization. The terms typically used by the MSA/Bh to refer to ultimate reality are: *anāsrava-dhātu* (the undefiled realm), *tattva* (reality), *tathatā* (thusness), *dharmatā* (reality), *dharma-dhātu* (the realm of the real), *paramārtha* (the ultimate), *pariniṣpanna* (the perfected), and *buddhatā* or *buddhatva* (buddhahood). It should be noted, however, that these terms are not strictly synonymous,[2] and not every one of these terms always refers to ultimate reality. For example, in the commentary to 11.43 the term *anāsrava-dhātu* is used to refer to the noble gotra (*ārya-gotra*), which cannot be directly equated with ultimate reality.[3] In MSA/Bh, Chapter 9, however, the commentary introduces 9.22-37 as verses on the profundity of the undefiled realm (*anāsrava-dhātu-gāmbhīrya*). These verses then go on to discuss the topic of buddhahood, which itself is assimilated to ultimate reality. Thus the term *anāsrava-dhātu* may here be taken as synonymous with ultimate reality. The same situation also occurs with most of the other terms for ultimate reality: in certain contexts they refer to ultimate reality, but in other contexts they do not. In relation to this issue, a second point to be noted is that, from the list of terms for ultimate reality offered above, the term *dharma-dhātu* seems to be the standard one used in the MSA/Bh. This is because, unlike the other terms, in every instance where it is used, the term *dharma-dhātu* may always be rather unequivocally translated as "ultimate reality" (or more specifically, "the realm of the real").

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2. That is to say, they are not synonymous in Quine's sense of satisfying the condition of interchangeability *salva veritate*; see Quine 1980, especially: 27-32. In this connection, also note Davidson's discussion of problems of synonymy and the term *paryāya* (1985: 116-125).

3. Recall that MSABh ad 3.4 states that gotra does not continue to exist along with its fruit; thus, upon the attainment of awakening, gotras cease to exist. This cannot be the case with ultimate reality.

Having identified the terms used to refer to ultimate reality, I now turn to the issue of what is said about this reality. In the chapter on *buddhatva*, I made a number of remarks about the MSA/Bh's interpretation of ultimate reality, since buddhahood is itself assimilated to that reality. Drawing from the comments I made in that and other chapters, and adding further material from the text, I would like to pick out four characteristics which seem to be attributed to ultimate reality by the MSA/Bh. I will specify each of these and offer supporting evidence from the text in the paragraphs that follow.

(1) Ultimate reality is understood to be naturally purified from all obstructions and defilements. Evidence for this may be seen at 9.22, where buddhahood is said to be thusness purified from all obstructions (*sarvāvaraṇa-nirmalā*); at 9.56, where thusness is said to be purified from the two obstructions; at 6.1, where the ultimate is said to be both unable to be purified since it is already naturally without defilement (*prakṛty-asaṃkliṣṭatva*), and able to be purified since the defilements are only adventitious (*āgantukopakleśa*);[4] and at 11.13, where reality (*tattva*) is said to be naturally pure since it is purified from defilements.

(2) Ultimate reality is characterized as non-dual. That is to say, ultimate reality is described as not having the characteristics of existence and non-existence, of subject and object, or of any other duality. Evidence for this may be seen in the commentary to 6.1, which states that the ultimate is non-dual;[5] at 6.8, which states that the realm of the real is

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4. The Sanskrit terms given here occur at MSABh ad 6.1.

5. MSABh ad 6.1: advayārtho hi paramārthaḥ/.

without duality;[6] and again at 11.13, which states that reality (*tattva*) is always without duality.

(3) Ultimate reality is understood to be identical with all phenomena. In the MSA/Bh, ultimate reality is not described as distinct from the totality of phenomena: it is not a reality which transcends phenomenal reality in some way or which stands at some higher plane of existence than phenomenal reality; rather, ultimate reality is taken to be coextensive with phenomenal reality. This point may be seen to follow directly from (2) described above: if ultimate reality is non-dual, it must be non-distinct from any and every other form of reality. Textual evidence for this may be found at 9.4, where the verse-text states that all phenomena are buddhahood, and the commentary adds that buddhahood is not different from thusness (*tathatā*); and at 11.14, where the commentary states that there is not anything other than the realm of the real (*dharma-dhātu*) because of the non-distinction of phenomena (*dharma*) and reality (*dharmatā*).

The further point should be made in connection with (3) that—in accordance with basic Mahāyāna ontology—the MSA/Bh makes the claim that all phenomena are empty of any form of inherent nature (*svabhāva*). This is stated explicitly in the first half of 18.101:

> sarva-dharmā anātmānaḥ paramārthena śūnyatā/
>
> All phenomena are without self; according to ultimate [truth], there is emptiness.

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6. MSA 6.8cd: dvayasya nāstitvam upetya dhīmān saṃtiṣṭhate 'tad-gati-dharma-dhātau//.

Given that all phenomena are understood as empty, and given that ultimate reality is not taken to be distinct from all phenomena, it thereby follows that ultimate reality itself must be interpreted as empty of inherent nature. And indeed this claim is made by the MSA/Bh; at 14.34 the verse-text states:

> abhāva-śūnyatāṃ jñātvā tathā-bhāvasya śūnyatāṃ/
> prakṛtyā śūnyatāṃ jñātvā śūnya-jña iti kathyate//
>
> When one knows the emptiness that is non-existence, the emptiness belonging to existence in that way, and the emptiness by nature, then one should be considered to be a knower of emptiness.

According to the commentary, the first form of emptiness corresponds to the imagined nature: it is empty because it does not exist. The second form of emptiness corresponds to the dependent nature: it is empty because it does not exist in the way it is thought to. And the third form of emptiness corresponds to the perfected nature: it is empty because its very nature is emptiness. Since the perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*) is synonymous with ultimate reality, we may infer that according to the MSA/Bh ultimate reality is empty of inherent nature.

The position of describing all phenomena as empty is quite standard for Mahāyāna Buddhism. Mahāyāna ontology takes up the abhidharma theme of analyzing reality into its constituent elements, but then extends this ontological critique by declaring that the constituent elements of reality are themselves empty of any form of inherent nature. Upholding such an ontological critique allows for a limited number of philosophical options with regard to claims about reality. One would be to deny that there is any sort of reality at all: if the constituent elements of reality are empty of

inherent nature then perhaps reality itself is unreal. But such a position would amount to a form of ontological nihilism, a position contrary to Buddhist strictures against the affirmation or denial of existence. Another option would be to refuse to say anything further about reality, to refrain from making any further metaphysical moves. This is the position that has usually been associated with Madhyamaka philosophy. A third option, however, would be to maintain that there are in the end no distinct constituent elements of reality, but to affirm that the substratum or basis upon which such distinctions are made does indeed exist (characterizable, perhaps, as a non-dual array of interrelated processes). This is the option taken by the MSA/Bh, and indeed by certain other texts that have been classified as Yogācāra.

(4) Ultimate reality is described as a non-constructive awareness. This point was made in the chapter on *buddhatva*, where I stated that buddhahood is described as an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance, and that buddhahood is declared to be equivalent to thusness. As I argued in that chapter, if buddhahood is characterized as an omniscient awareness, and if buddhahood is also equated with thusness (with reality itself), then omniscient awareness must be assimilated to reality. Evidence for (4) may be found at 9.2, which states that buddhahood is an awareness of all modes of appearance (*sarvākāra-jñatā*); at 9.33, which states that the awareness of a buddha illuminates all objects of knowledge;[7] at 9.56, which states that the characteristic of the realm of the real is the awareness of objects and the awareness which is its support

7. MSA 9.33cd: sakṛt jñeyaṃ tathā sarvaṃ buddha-jñānaiḥ prabhāsyate//.

(which, as I pointed out in the chapter on *buddhatva*, may be equated with the non-constructive awareness—the fundamental awareness of a buddha); at 9.68, which states that the mirror-awareness of a buddha is without confusion regarding any object of knowledge; at 14.46, which states that the awareness of all modes of appearance is the unexcelled point (*anuttara-pada*), which may be equated with buddhahood; and also in the commentary to 11.31, which links thusness to supramundane awareness (*lokottara-jñāna*), in that both are without imagination (*akalpa*).

Metaphysical idealism

Given these four characteristics of ultimate reality according to the MSA/Bh, I now turn to some general considerations regarding the text's ontological claims. The first question I will address is the issue of metaphysical idealism. A. C. Ewing, in his study of idealism in western philosophy, defines idealism as "the view that there can be no physical objects existing apart from some experience" or as "the belief that physical objects cannot exist apart from some experience or mind" (1974: 3 and 6). Macquarrie offers a substantially similar definition, and adds that in idealism "reality is conceived in terms of mind or experience" (1989: 23). In examining the MSA/Bh's ontological claims, Davidson (1985: 261) and Griffiths (1990a: 106), for example, have concluded that the text posits a form of idealism; on the other hand, Nguyen (1990: 317-319), for example, has stated that it would be incorrect to interpret the MSA/Bh as upholding a form of idealism. In some cases, the rejection of the view of the Yogācāra as idealist is coupled with the suggestion that Yogācāra philosophy be looked at in terms of

philosophical psychology or phenomenology. While not by any means wishing to criticize the validity or utility of examining a text such as the MSA/Bh in terms of philosophical psychology or phenomenology, I think it is the case that the ontological claims put forth by the MSA/Bh clearly imply a form of idealism. This follows from (4), discussed above, and from the evidence offered in its support: ultimate reality is described as a non-conceptually-constructed form of awareness that encompasses all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. And since ultimate reality is taken to be non-dual, and is not understood to be distinct from phenomena, the text denies that there are two realities—for example, a physical reality vs. a mental one, or an objective reality vs. a subjective one. Rather, reality *simpliciter* is described as an awareness: a non-dual, non-conceptually-constructive awareness that is not distinct from phenomena. And since in the MSA/Bh ultimate reality is fundamentally defined in terms of an awareness, the text may be appropriately described as advancing a form of idealism, especially in Macquarrie's sense since "reality is conceived in terms of mind or experience."

In connection with the point that ultimate reality is defined in terms of an awareness, it should also be recalled that this awareness is understood to be completely unmediated, not employing concepts and language in order to categorize and describe phenomena in any way, and entirely without a conception of itself as a distinct entity or ego. Furthermore, this awareness is also understood as entirely devoid of volitional dispositions or impulses. As such, this awareness would be completely detached from the notion of action, as that term is normally understood. In the MSA/Bh, buddhahood is

said to function according to the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation, which spontaneously appear in various world-realms according to the needs of sentient beings; and this functioning in the world is not accompanied by any sort of volitional activity.[8] So while the MSA/Bh does posit a form of idealism, it is important to note that it is an idealism devoid of a subject; that is to say, while the text posits a form of metaphysical idealism, it is decidedly not a form of subjective idealism or absolute idealism. While according to the MSA/Bh reality is an awareness that encompasses all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearances, the text does not posit that reality subsists in the mind of an omniscient god or the absolute. Rather, reality is interpreted as an immediate, unmediated, variegated, non-dual, egoless awareness.[9]

Conventional vs. ultimate

According to the MSA/Bh, the mind typically understands reality in only a partial way, mediated by various concepts and categories, and dualistically distinguished into ego-subject and various objects. This may be summarized by stating that the mind views reality in terms of phenomena, or through its conventional aspect, rather than in terms of thusness, or through its ultimate aspect. This device of describing reality in terms of

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8. MSA 9.52 states that sentient beings are brought to maturity by buddhas without volitions (*vinā saṃskāraṃ*); and at MSA 9.18 and 9.19 the activity of buddhas is described as without effort (*vinābhogaṃ*). On this theme, see Griffiths 1994: 103-107.

9. Cf. Williams' description of the ontological substratum according to Yogācāra philosophy: "there remains a really existing, pure, non-conceptual, non-dual flow of awareness" (1989: 90); and also Griffiths' description: "What exists, on the Yogācāra view, is a (relatively) seamless fabric of representations with modes of appearance, variegated and complex, changing through time, but emphatically not composed of substantively separable parts" (1990a: 107).

phenomena (conventionally) and in terms of thusness (ultimately) is important to the MSA/Bh's ontological discourse. Although the conventional and ultimate are not themselves taken to be ultimately distinct—phenomena are not distinct from thusness—they are described as distinct in that they represent two aspects of the same reality. The conventional or phenomenal aspect is understood as reality viewed by the mind of a sentient being, while the ultimate or "thusness" aspect is understood as reality viewed by the mind of a buddha (which, in so doing, is itself said to become coextensive with and equivalent to reality).

This difference in descriptions of perspectives on reality allows for distinctions to be made, for example, with respect to the embodiments of buddhahood, the awarenesses of a buddha, and the three natures. Of the three embodiments of buddhahood, the first embodiment—the essential body (*svābhāvika-kāya*) or the real body (*dharma-kāya*)—may be understood as buddhahood as it is in itself—that is, from the perspective of buddha-mind or viewed in terms of the ultimate aspect of reality. The other two embodiments—the embodiments of enjoyment and transformation (*sāṃbhogika-* and *nairmāṇika-kāya*s)—represent buddhahood in its phenomenal aspect—that is, as it appears conventionally or as it appears through the conceptual mediation of the minds of non-buddhas.[10] The embodiments of enjoyment and manifestation do not represent buddhahood as it really is, but only as it conventionally appears. The same distinction applies to the four awarenesses of buddhahood: the mirror-awareness is taken to be the

10. Griffiths (1994: 96) describes this aspect of buddhahood in terms of relational properties that have the form "seems to S to be P," seeming to some sentient being, S, to have the property, P.

awareness of buddhahood as it is in itself, while the other three awarenesses—which are subsequently-attained and which are based on mirror-awareness—represent buddhahood as it conventionally appears to sentient beings. And again, this distinction may also be applied to the model of the three natures.

The three natures (*trisvabhāva*)

The three natures (*trisvabhāva*) or three characteristics (*trilakṣaṇa*), the imagined (*parikalpita*), dependent (*paratantra*), and perfected (*pariniṣpanna*), have already been discussed in previous chapters. Here, however, I would like to say more about their relation to the MSA/Bh's ontological claims. One standard interpretation of the three natures may be given in the following terms.[11] The dependent nature is the basis or substratum of reality; it is comprised of a dependently co-originated, interconnected web of ever-changing representations, which are themselves empty of inherent nature. The imagined nature is the dependent nature when viewed through a matrix of conceptual construction; the imagined nature sees the dependent nature as comprised of distinct entities with enduring, inherent natures. The perfected nature, however, is the dependent nature without the conceptual matrix of the imagined nature.

The MSA/Bh's interpretation of the three natures, however, differs in a not insignificant way from what I have offered as the standard interpretation. Briefly stated, the difference between the MSA/Bh's interpretation and the interpretation above, is that

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11. See, for example, Williams' discussion of the three aspects (1989: 82-85).

the MSA/Bh does not emphasize the ultimate existence of the dependent nature. In the interpretation offered above, the dependent nature is understood to be ultimately real since it is the basis or substratum of reality itself: although the dependent nature is empty of inherent nature, it does exist. In the MSA/Bh, however, the existence of the dependent nature is not ultimately affirmed (although it is, of course, conventionally affirmed). In discussing the non-duality of the ultimate, the commentary to 6.1 states that the ultimate is not existent because of the imagined and dependent characteristics, but it is not non-existent because of the perfected characteristic.[12] This implies that the dependent characteristic does not ultimately exist. And in the commentary to 18.81, the dependent characteristic is said to be impermanent (*anitya*), just as the imagined characteristic is declared to be.[13] So here the dependent characteristic is not presented as the existent basis or substratum of reality, but rather is categorized with the (non-existent) imagined characteristic. Also at 11.13, the commentary states that the dependent nature is to be abandoned (*praheyam*). Such a statement would be unreasonable if the dependent nature were understood to be the basis or substratum of reality, given that the ultimate goal posited by the text is assimilation to reality itself. Furthermore, the commentary to 19.51 states that thorough knowledge of the three natures brings about the termination of the dependent nature.[14] Again, this would not be reasonable if the dependent nature were understood to be the ultimate substratum of reality.

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12. MSABh ad 6.1: na sat parikalpita-paratantra-lakṣaṇābhyāṃ na cāsat pariniṣpanna-lakṣaṇena/.

13. MSABh ad 18.81: kṣaṇa-bhaṅgārtho 'py anityārtho veditavyaḥ paratantra-lakṣaṇasya/.

14. MSABh ad 19.51: etena yathā-svabhāva-traya-parijñānāt paratantra-svabhāva-kṣayāya saṃvartate/.

So in the MSA/Bh, the dependent nature is categorized with the imagined nature, and is discussed in terms of the phenomenal or conventional aspect of reality. The difference between the imagined nature and the dependent nature, according to the MSA/Bh, is that the imagined nature is conventional reality viewed through a matrix of conceptual construction, where the representations that appear are taken to be distinct objects with inherent natures; in the dependent nature, on the other hand, the representations that appear are understood to be themselves illusory. As 11.16 declares, in ultimate truth, there is not the existence of the imagined nature in the dependent nature.

In the context of the MSA/Bh, the perfected nature is the only one of the three natures that is posited as ultimately existent. In the commentary to 11.41, the perfected characteristic is equated with thusness (*tathatā*), an important term for ultimate reality in the text. And in the commentary to 11.13, the perfected nature is said to be naturally purified (*prakṛtyā viśuddha*) from defilements, which is itself a characteristic of ultimate reality, as discussed in point (1) above. Also, the commentary to 19.79 equates the comprehension of the perfected with buddhahood; in that buddhahood may be understood as the awareness of thusness, here the perfected is again related to thusness.[15] Furthermore, in the commentary to 20-21.60-61, the text states that purified thusness (*viśuddhā tathatā*) is the perfected (*niṣpanna*), which is the ultimate (*paramārtha*). So here it can be seen that the perfected nature is brought together with terms for ultimate reality. Therefore, according to the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the three natures, it is not

15. MSABh ad 19.79: tatra niṣpanna-bodho buddhatvaṃ/.

the dependent nature that is ultimately real or that functions as the substratum of reality; rather, it is the perfected nature that is ultimately real.

The following diagram may further help to clarify the MSA/Bh's interpretation of the three natures through showing how the three natures relate to the distinction between the conventional and the ultimate:

CONVENTIONAL REALITY (phenomena)		
	reality viewed in terms of conceptual construction and the subject-object distinction:	imagined nature
	reality viewed as unreal imagination, as an illusion where apparent objects are not taken to be real:	dependent nature
ULTIMATE REALITY (thusness)		
	pure, unmediated awareness of thusness:	perfected nature

Again, it should be emphasized that conventional reality and ultimate reality are not taken to be distinct; conventional reality is reality as viewed from the perspective of sentient minds, while ultimate reality is reality as viewed from the perspective of buddha-mind.

Given that the three-nature doctrine pertains to differences in perspectives on reality, it would be inappropriate to characterize this doctrine as a purely ontological model employed by the MSA/Bh. Rather, the three-nature doctrine is better understood as a soteriologico-ontological model: it is a model that identifies stages of ontological gnosis that must be traversed in order to attain buddhahood. These stages of ontological

gnosis may be specified in the following terms. Ordinary sentient minds confront reality in terms of a subject-object distinction and thereby construct the flow of appearances into distinct entities with enduring natures; this is the level of the imagined nature. Then, when a sentient mind comes to the realization that conceptually-constructed entities do not themselves exist, but that the illusion which is the basis of these constructions (unreal imagination) does exist, that is the level of the dependent nature. Finally, when the termination of the illusion is brought about—when the basis of the matrix of conceptual construction is abandoned—buddhahood, an unmediated awareness of thusness, is attained; this is the level of the perfected nature. The key, then, to understanding the doctrine of the three natures in the MSA/Bh is to interpret the doctrine in soteriologico-ontological terms: the three-nature doctrine is not a model of reality *simpliciter*; rather, it is a model of how reality is to be realized for the attainment of buddhahood.

Mind-only (*citta-mātra*) and representation-only (*vijñapti-mātra*)

In the chapter on *vimukti* I remarked that in the context of the MSA/Bh, the doctrines of mind-only and representation-only were not to be understood as ultimately valid, since in the end the goal is to realize that even mind does not exist. The doctrines of mind-only and representation-only are often taken as hallmark doctrines of the Yogācāra; it has sometimes been stated that the Yogācāra is metaphysically idealist because of the claim that reality is "nothing but mind" (*citta-mātra*) or "nothing but

representation" (*vijñapti-mātra*).[16] In the specific case of the MSA/Bh, however, while the text does posit a form of metaphysical idealism, it would be incorrect to link this idealism to the terms "mind-only" (*citta-mātra*) or "representation-only" (*vijñapti-mātra*) in the text. In the context of the MSA/Bh, these terms (like those for the three natures) are better understood as soteriologico-ontological doctrines: they do not represent reality as it really is; rather, they identify stages of ontological gnosis that must be traversed in order to attain buddhahood.

As with the doctrine of the three natures, we may chart out the stages of ontological gnosis according to the doctrine of mind-only or representation-only in terms of the distinction between the conventional and ultimate aspects of reality:

CONVENTIONAL REALITY
(phenomena)

	reality viewed in terms of the subject-object distinction; mind as distinct from the objects that confront it:	duality
	reality viewed as nothing-but-mind; all phenomena reduced to mind:	mind-only[17]

ULTIMATE REALITY
(thusness)

	not even mind taken to exist:	buddhahood

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16. See, for example, Griffiths 1990a: 106-107 and Luis Gómez, "Buddhism in India," in Kitagawa and Cummings 1987: 84-85.

17. On the diagrams of the three-nature doctrine and the mind-only doctrine offered here, the dependent nature and mind occupy a similar location. It is interesting to note that at MSABh ad 13.19, the dependent characteristic is associated with mind: na ca dharmatā-cittād ṛte 'nasya cetasaḥ paratantra-lakṣaṇasya prakṛti-prabhāsvaratvaṃ vidhīyate/.

Again, it should be recalled that the text asserts that neither mind-only nor representation-only exists.[18] Since mind is not taken to be ultimately real, it would be incorrect to characterize the doctrine of mind-only or representation-only as the fundamental ontological theory of the MSA/Bh. Rather, these doctrines function as soteriologico-ontological doctrines: they specify stages of ontological gnosis that must be passed through in order to attain buddhahood.

I would like to make one further point regarding the doctrine of idealism in the MSA/Bh. Davidson (1985: 267-268) has pointed out that there are a number of claims in the MSA/Bh that seem to contradict the position of metaphysical idealism. Such claims occur in the commentary to 11.48, where the four aggregates other than form are said to be designation-only (which implies that form itself is not designation-only);[19] in the discussion of the transformation of external objects (9.41), which implies that there are objects external to the mind which may be transformed;[20] and in the discussion of the momentariness of external objects, where the four great elements are specifically referred to (MSABh ad 18.89-91). These claims are all apparently inconsistent with the position of metaphysical idealism. This state of affairs, however, should not be too surprising given that the MSA/Bh is a less than systematic text. Yet it should also be pointed out that claims inconsistent with idealism do not by any means form the dominant part of the

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18. See MSABh ad 6.6-9 and MSA 11.47. These points were discussed in Chapter 4.

19. At MSA/Bh 11.37, however, the category of *citta* is divided into *vijñāna* and *rūpa*. This seems to be inconsistent with the claim in 11.47 that the aggregates *other than form* are designation-only.

20. MSA 9.41 mentions the *pañcendriya-parāvṛtti* (the transformation of the five senses) and *sarvārtha-vṛtti* (the transformation of all objects).

MSA/Bh's ontological discourse. Furthermore, it is possible to interpret such claims in the same terms that I interpreted the doctrine of mind-only, and to view them as consistent with a position of metaphysical idealism. Like the doctrine of mind-only, statements that posit a reality external to mind may be placed at the conventional level as a particular stage of ontological gnosis. Such claims, however, would fall under the first subdivision of the category of conventional reality: reality viewed in terms of the subject-object distinction. Claims that posit an external reality may also operate as stages of ontological gnosis according to the soteriologico-ontological model of the doctrine of mind-only. For example, one route to the realization of the doctrine of mind-only might be to first analyze reality along abhidharma lines, into the internal and external constituent elements of form, etc.[21] Thus statements in the MSA/Bh that seem to contradict the position of metaphysical idealism need not be read as such; it is not necessary to posit that "the idealism of the MSA/Bh is not well thought out" or that the author "has not remembered to apply it to all his categories" (Davidson 1985: 268). Statements that imply an extra-mental reality may be read in the same key as the mind-only doctrine itself: as aspects of a soteriologico-ontological model, rather than as purely ontological claims.

21. MSABh ad 11.5: yadi grāhyārthād grāhakārtham abhinnaṃ paśyati grāhakārthāc ca grāhyārthaṃ dvayasya punaḥ samas tasyādhyātmika-bāhyālambanasya tathatāyā lābhas tayor eva dvayor anupalambhād

A note on the adventitious defilements

While the doctrines of the three natures and mind-only represent stages of gnosis on the path to buddhahood, there is, according to the text, a barrier to realizing these stages, which is why sentient beings are not already awakened buddhas. This barrier is represented by the defilements (*kleśa*). In various locations in the text the defilements are said to be adventitious (*āgantuka*): they do not form an intrinsic part of the structure of ultimate reality, since ultimate reality is fundamentally pure. The question, then, may be raised as to the importance of these defilements or as to their ultimate source: to what degree are the defilements real? If they are real, then what is their source? And if they are not real, then what is their significance? How are the defilements able to obstruct the attainment of awakening? I think that there is a certain sense in which such questions are misguided, and that the category of the defilements should be considered from a different perspective. The defilements do not have to be ultimately real in order to be soteriologically significant; they may be only conventionally real and still obstruct the path to awakening (sentient beings themselves, after all, are understood as only conventionally existent). In fact, the category of the defilements should be looked at simply as a label for certain conventional events and processes that prevent the specific realization of the illusory nature of the subject-object distinction and the expansion of awareness to encompass all of reality. The defilements are understood to be both comprised of and the result of specific cognitive and emotive functions, functions that are

veditavyaḥ/. According to this verse and its commentary, reality should be analyzed into its internal and external constituents, and then it may be realized that these constituents are non-distinct.

natural to or concomitant with certain patterns of momentary events (e.g., the patterns of events designated as sentient beings). These modes of functioning, however, have no claim to ultimate validity. Conventionally the defilements are understood to be quite real—as real as any other mental processes; but ultimately they are interpreted as empty of inherent existence (as are all other phenomena).

It should not be thought of as odd, in the end, that sentient beings are described as "afflicted" by "defilements." Sentient beings are, after all, understood to be limited by their very nature: they are not naturally endowed with an awareness that reflects all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. What is, perhaps, odd is that sentient beings are said to have the potential to expand their awareness and attain buddhahood at all. The more pertinent question, then, is that of the ontological basis that allows certain continuous patterns of momentary events (conventionally designated as sentient beings) to attain buddhahood.

The ground of awakening

Here I will be concerned with identifying that element or aspect of sentient beings which allows for the attainment of buddhahood. Consider: if sentient beings are continuous series of processes of momentary events—which themselves lack any form of inherent nature—how can a sentient being possibly attain buddhahood, the awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance—a state understood to be coextensive with and equivalent to reality itself? What element or aspect of these series allows for them to attain reality itself, in its totality? In discussions about the MSA/Bh,

two responses may typically be offered to this question. The first is that it is gotra that allows for the attainment of buddhahood. The second is that it is the embryo of buddhahood (*tathāgatagarbha*) that allows for this attainment. Here I will argue that both of these responses are inadequate.

In the chapter on gotra we saw that according to the MSA/Bh gotras may be either definite or indefinite. That is to say, some sentient beings are said to have gotras that cannot be altered and will certainly lead to a specific ultimate soteriological goal, whether that be nirvāṇa without residual conditioning or buddhahood. Other sentient beings, on the other hand, are said to have gotras that can be altered; such beings have the possibility of shifting from, say, the śrāvaka-gotra to the bodhisattva-gotra. In that there are at least some sentient beings who are described as not having a definite gotra, but who are also described as able to acquire a definite gotra in the future, there must be other factors that are understood to determine the particular gotra of a sentient being. And as we saw in the chapter on gotra, those factors are the roots of good (*kuśala-mūla*), which are acquired through one's actions. In fact, at 3.11 the text states that there are some sentient beings who have no gotra at all, but who may later acquire one through amassing roots of good. So since the presence of a gotra depends on other factors—not on the prior existence of the gotra itself from beginningless time—it cannot be said that gotra serves as the ontological ground of soteriological attainment in the MSA/Bh.

Another candidate for the ontological ground of soteriological attainment is the embryo of buddhahood (*tathāgatagarbha*). In 9.37, the verse-text states that all living beings have thusness as their nature, and that it is by virtue of that nature that they are

able to attain buddhahood. So according to this verse, the characteristic of having thusness as one's nature is the basis that allows for the attainment of buddhahood. But the precise meaning of having thusness as one's nature is not further specified. As we saw above, thusness (*tathatā*) is one term for ultimate reality in the MSA/Bh. So perhaps we may take it to mean that all sentient beings have ultimate reality as their nature: after all, sentient beings are continuous series (*saṃtāna*) of phenomena (*dharmas*), and phenomena are not different from reality (*dharmatā*). But in this case sentient beings could not be distinguished from inanimate objects: clouds and fossilized bones are also phenomena, and therefore, following this line of thought, also have thusness as their nature. So perhaps we should take thusness to mean something else; perhaps we should equate it with emptiness. But then again the case of inanimate objects must be considered: clouds and fossilized bones (as phenomena) also have the nature of emptiness, and the text neither claims nor, I believe, does it wish to claim that inanimate objects are able to attain buddhahood. The problem, then, is how thusness should be further specified. Perhaps it is not just thusness *simpliciter* that allows sentient beings to attain buddhahood. Perhaps it is the thusness of some other basis or aspect of sentient beings that allows for this attainment. As the text stands, the term *tathāgatagarbha* is perhaps best understood as an indicator for the doctrine that all sentient beings have the potentiality to attain buddhahood, which leaves open the question of the ontological ground for this attainment. In the next section of this chapter, however, I will argue that it is mind which serves as the ontological basis for soteriological attainment.

Mind (*citta*)

The first point to be noted with regard to the term *citta* is that it is used in the MSA/Bh in a number of contexts and with a variety of specific meanings. There are five specific contexts in which the term *citta* is used in the MSA/Bh that I would like to pick out for further consideration.[22] (1) In one context (MSABh ad 19.76), *citta* is taken to refer to the store-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), which is the root consciousness in the standard Yogācāra eightfold scheme of consciousnesses. Since the store-consciousness is the aggregation of karmic seeds that function as the basis for the manifestation of conscious experience, it is itself unconscious. So in this context, *citta* refers to an unconscious mental continuity. (2) In another context (MSA/Bh 11.37), *citta* is understood as an abhidharma category—as one of the basic categories under which individual momentary events that comprise reality are classified.[23] In the commentary to this verse, *citta* is divided into consciousness (*vijñāna*) and form (*rūpa*). Thus this verse and commentary seem to imply that objects external to mind do not actually exist as such. Which leads to a third context in which the term *citta* is used: (3) in discussions of the doctrine of mind-only (*citta-mātra*), which I examined above. (4) In other contexts *citta* is said to be naturally luminous and pure.[24] In these contexts, mind is said to be

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22. Although *citta* is sometimes best translated as "thought," I am focusing on the contexts in which it is best translated as "mind."

23. MSA/Bh 11.37 states that the divisions of the indicated (*lakṣya*) are the following: mind (*citta*), which is divided into consciousness (*vijñāna*) and form (*rūpa*); mental factors (*caitasika*); factors not associated with mind (*citta-viprayukta*); and the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*).

24. See MSA 13.19, discussed in Chapter 3; and MSABh ad 18.42-44: cittasya prakṛti-prabhāsvaratva-parijñayā ākāśavat/.

intrinsically pure, and is defiled only adventitiously: there is nothing fundamental to the functioning of mind that necessarily involves processes of defilement. (5) The final context I would like to call attention to is one in which mind is attributed to buddhas. This occurs at MSA 20-21.44, where the mind of a buddha is said to be liberated (*mukta-citta*). This statement is, perhaps, odd in that mind is normally understood to be a continuum of mental events, empty of inherent nature, and dependent on causes and conditions; a definition that would be too limited for the MSA/Bh's interpretation of buddhahood as an uninterrupted, immediate, and seamless awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance.

From these various contexts of usage, it is clear that the term *citta* does not always have the same reference in each of its uses in the MSA/Bh. For example, according to (1) *citta* refers to the store-consciousness. In this same text-location (MSABh ad 19.76), while the term *citta* refers to the store-consciousness, *manas* refers to the defiled mind, and *vijñāna* refers to the other six consciousnesses (mental consciousness and the five sensory consciousnesses). Thus here *citta* is distinguished from *vijñāna*. According to (2), however, *citta* is divided into *vijñāna* and *rūpa*; so here *vijñāna* is a subdivision of *citta*. In (1), however, the model at work is that of the eightfold scheme of consciousnesses, while in (2) it is that of the five abhidharma categories. Thus in order to resolve the inconsistency, it would be necessary to bring the two models together in some way. Furthermore, according to (1) *citta* refers to the store-consciousness, while according to (5) *citta* is a property of buddhas (who have terminated the store-

consciousness). So in these two instances the term *citta* cannot be taken to have the same reference.

It is my contention that mind is that aspect of sentient beings which serves as the ontological basis for soteriological attainment according to the MSA/Bh. The basic definition I have of mind in this context is mind as a continuum of mental events which have as their characteristic property the representation of some object through some particular mode of appearance.[25] These events are themselves momentary, empty of inherent nature, and, as such, dependent on causes and conditions. This basic definition of mind may be reconciled with the first four understandings of the term *citta* that I outlined above. (1) When viewed in terms of the eightfold scheme of consciousnesses, mind is the store-consciousness, the substratum or repository of mental impressions or tendencies, which allows for all other consciousnesses to function. (2) When viewed in terms of the five abhidharma categories, mind may be equated with all forms of consciousness (including those of the eightfold scheme) and with the objects of form that are represented to consciousness. And if mind is understood in this way, (3) all objects external to mind may be reduced to mind itself, thus mind is the basis of phenomenal reality. (4) This mind is seen as luminous by nature and fundamentally pure: taking conceptual construction as the primary defilement, we might say that there is no necessity for mind to construct representations through conceptualization; it may, rather, reflect such representations purely, without conceptual construction. And if this occurs, (5) the

25. That is to say, a mental event has an *ālambana* and an *ākāra*. For some definitions of mental events in Indian Buddhist theory, see Griffiths 1990a: 93.

mind of a sentient being may be converted into the "mind" of a buddha; although, here "mind" may no longer be understood in the sense of a "continuum of mental events which have as their characteristic property the representation of some object through some particular mode of appearance," since the mind of a buddha is not itself a continuum of momentary events.

Again, it is my contention that in the context of the MSA/Bh, sentient beings possess mind, and that mind is the element or aspect which serves as the ontological basis for soteriological attainments. On my reading of the MSA/Bh, the characteristic of possessing mind is what most fundamentally distinguishes sentient beings from inanimate beings, and allows for the attainment of awakening, nirvāṇa, and buddhahood itself. Throughout the MSA/Bh, the attainment of soteriological goals is described in mental terms: liberation, for example, may be defined in terms of liberation from the cognitive and afflictive obstructions, and its attainment is said to be through the understanding of the absence of self in persons and phenomena, the realization of representation-only, and the penetration of insight; non-abiding nirvāṇa is related to the equality-awareness of a buddha; the attainment of awakening is closely linked to the concept of mental application (*manas-kāra*); and buddhahood is said to be brought about through the cultivation of the awareness of thusness.[26] Thus the category of mind plays a central role in the soteriological attainments discussed by the MSA/Bh. And since this category plays such a significant role in the MSA/Bh's scheme of soteriological attainments, we may

26. These four points were elucidated in Chapters 4-7, respectively.

specify mind as the ontological basis of attainment in the MSA/Bh. It is not gotra or the embryo of buddhahood that serves as the ontological ground of soteriological attainment in the MSA/Bh, rather it is mind. The only task that remains, then, is to identify how the conception of mind in the MSA/Bh allows for the text's distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

Mind and the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction

I began this chapter with an examination of ultimate reality according to the MSA/Bh. There I outlined the terms in which ultimate reality is described in the text, and I identified the way in which ultimate reality may be viewed from two perspectives: from the ultimate perspective it is an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance, which is equated with buddhahood and thusness; from the conventional perspective, it may be understood as a dependently co-originated array of processes comprised of momentary events. This distinction between the perspective of thusness and the perspective of phenomena was then applied to an interpretation of the three natures and the doctrine of mind-only, which I argued are best understood in the context of the MSA/Bh as soteriologico-ontological models, rather than as purely ontological doctrines. Then after briefly discussing the adventitious defilements, I moved on to determine that element or aspect of sentient beings which may be understood to serve as the ontological ground of soteriological attainment according to the text. And I identified that element as mind. Here I will state the relationship between these ontological claims, including the conception of mind, and the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction in the text.

Considered from the perspective of phenomena (rather than from the perspective of thusness) reality is understood as an infinitely variegated array of interrelated processes of momentary events, none of which may ultimately be separated out as a distinct entity with an inherent nature, existing in and of itself. Given this array of processes, however, continua of mental events may be usefully separated out (from a soteriological point of view) and labeled as minds. These continua of minds, conventionally understood, are taken to be comprised of events that have the characteristic of representing some object through some particular mode of appearance. Since minds are understood as comprised of momentary phenomena, they may not be directly equated with ultimate reality (*tathatā*, *buddhatva*, *dharma-dhātu*, etc); they must be understood as only conventionally existent. But in the MSA/Bh, minds are a soteriologically significant category of conventional existent, since they function to bring representations to awareness. Thus they reflect at the conventional level the mode of functioning of ultimate reality itself, since ultimate reality itself is understood to be an awareness.

When mind is restricted by the defilements, however, its functioning is understood to be limited and quite far removed from the awareness of ultimate reality. And since mind is characterized as a continuous series of momentary events, it may be brought to cessation like any other continuous series of events. But insofar as mind is understood as able to expand awareness, insofar as the functioning of awareness may move beyond the limits that normally constrain it, it may more closely approach ultimate reality itself. Thus, according to this line of thought, there are three options available to

mind: it may continue to function in its normal mode, which is equivalent to remaining in saṃsāra; it may be brought to cessation, which is equivalent to attaining nirvāṇa without residual conditioning; or it may expand its mode of functioning until it is transformed into an all-encompassing awareness, which is equivalent to buddhahood.

The ontological distinction between the perspective of phenomena and the perspective of thusness allows for the soteriological distinction between the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in the MSA/Bh. From the perspective of phenomena, reality is viewed as an array of interrelated processes implicated with or constitutive of the experience of suffering. So from this perspective the ultimate objective is the termination of such processes, which is the goal of the Hīnayāna. From the perspective of thusness, however, reality is viewed as an immediate, unmediated, non-dual awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. So from this perspective the ultimate objective is the attainment of such an awareness, or the attainment of reality itself, which is the goal of the Mahāyāna. Both goals are validly realizable according to the MSA/Bh, although the text characterizes the goal of the Mahāyāna as a more comprehensive one.

The MSA/Bh's particular conception of mind—as a continuum of mental events that is intrinsically pure and that in some way mirrors the basis of ultimate reality itself—serves as the ontological ground for the distinction between the attainments of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. On this reading of the text, if a continuum of mental events is terminated, then the Hīnayāna goal of nirvāṇa without residual conditioning is said to be attained; and if a continuum of mental events expands its mode of functioning until its

basis is transformed into an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance, then the Mahāyāna goal of buddhahood is said to be attained.

Chapter 14
Epistemological considerations

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the relationship between theory of knowledge and the Buddhist soteriological vehicles according to the MSA/Bh. I will reflect on and address the following questions: from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, which vehicle or vehicles encompass or lead to knowledge? Does the Hīnayāna bear some direct relationship to knowledge? Or does only the Mahāyāna do so? Or does neither? In addressing these questions it will of course be necessary to come to an understanding of what knowledge is according to the MSA/Bh. This in itself is no simple task, since the text does not purport to be a treatise on epistemology. Nevertheless, the text does have a good deal to say about knowledge, so it is not unreasonable to attempt to discern some pattern in these remarks, and to relate the text's conceptions of knowledge to its conception of the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

I will begin with a brief review of the MSA/Bh's basic epistemological claims. Discussions of theory of knowledge in Indian philosophical texts often focus on the important epistemological term *pramāṇa*, or "valid means of knowledge." The MSA/Bh employs this term, for example, at 12.8, where the commentary states that the teaching must be consistent with a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇāvirodha*). The text also employs the term *pramāṇa* in the verse-text and commentary to 19.45, where it states that one of the four forms of reasoning (*yukti*) is examination according to a valid means of knowledge, such as perception, etc. (*pratyakṣādi*). While perception (*pratyakṣa*) and

inference (*anumāna*) are usually identified as the standard Mahāyāna Buddhist *pramāṇa*s, the MSA/Bh almost certainly accepts authority (*śabda*) as a third valid means of knowledge, even though it is not specifically discussed. The commentary to 12.8 states that the teaching must be consistent with a valid means of knowledge, and 18.31 states that the definitive meaning (*nītārtha*) must be established by a valid means of knowledge. But this valid means cannot be inference, since 1.12 states that the Mahāyāna is beyond the scope of logic (*tarka*). Furthermore, the commentary to 18.31 specifically affirms that the definitive meaning is established by a valid means of knowledge if it is given by an authoritative teacher (which in a Mahāyāna context usually refers to a buddha or an advanced bodhisattva).[1] Thus authority seems to qualify as a valid means of knowledge in the MSA/Bh.[2]

It should be emphasized that according to the MSA/Bh, the valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) are not the only forms of valid reasoning (*yukti*). At 19.45, the text also identifies the following forms of reasoning: reasoning through fundamental mental application (*yoniśo-manas-kāra*) in the three vehicles, also called reasoning through consideration; reasoning through right view (*samyag-dṛṣṭi*), also identified as reasoning through cause and effect; and reasoning that is beyond thought (*acintya*), also

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1. MSABh ad 18.31: tatra prāmāṇiko 'rtho yaḥ pramāṇa-bhūtena nīto vibhaktaḥ śāstrā vā tat-pramāṇī-kṛtena vā/.

2. Note that the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Sanskrit ed., Dutt 1966: 25) does specifically refer to *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), and *āpta* (an authoritative or trustworthy person) as the valid means of knowledge.

described as reasoning through reality. So *pramāṇa* is not identified as the exclusive route to knowledge in the MSA/Bh.

While 19.45 identifies the four forms of reasoning, 11.31 specifies the four objects of knowledge (*jñeya*). The four categories of objects that may be known are: unreal imagination (*abhūta-kalpa*), which is imagination that does not conform to supramundane awareness (*lokottara-jñāna*); neither existent nor non-existent, which is imagination that does conform to supramundane awareness; not imagined (*akalpa*), which is thusness, or supramundane awareness; and neither imagined nor not imagined, which is the subsequently-attained awareness (*pṛṣṭha-labdha-jñāna*). These four categories identify the scope of knowledge according to the MSA/Bh. At the extreme limits, objects of knowledge may be either unreal (i.e., unreal imagination, a term which the text equates with the dependent nature at, for example, 11.40) or real (i.e., not imagined). The other two objects of knowledge occupy an intermediary position between reality and unreality or imagination and non-imagination.

Although the text does not explicitly do so, I would suggest that the four objects of knowledge may be related to the four forms of reasoning as follows:

object of knowledge	form of awareness	form of reasoning
unreal imagination (conventional reality)	does not conform to supramundane awareness	valid means of knowledge
neither existent nor non-existent[3]	does conform to supramundane awareness	mental application in the three vehicles

3. Here the commentary mentions the aids to penetration (*nirvedha-bhāgīya*), so this category may be related to mental application in the three vehicles, since the aids to penetration form part of the path of application (*prayoga-mārga*) of all three vehicles.

not imagined (ultimate reality, thusness)	supramundane awareness	beyond thought
neither imagined nor not imagined	subsequently-attained awareness	right view

Since thusness and supramundane awareness are discussed throughout the MSA/Bh only in relation to the Mahāyāna, it may be inferred that there is at least one category of objects of knowledge which is accessible only to the Mahāyāna. I will return to this point in my concluding remarks. First, however, I would like to consider the issue of the definition of knowledge.

Defining knowledge

There is no one specific term in the MSA/Bh which may be taken to mean "knowledge," in the senses of that term that are most common to western philosophical discourse. While the term *jñāna* may be translated as "knowledge" in some contexts, in other contexts it is better translated as "awareness" (which is, in fact, how I have most often translated the term in this study). Other terms derived from the verbal root *jñā* are also important to the MSA/Bh's theory of knowledge; for example, *jña*[4] (knowing), *jñatā* (knowledge), or *jñeya* (object of knowledge). The use of terms derived from the verbal roots *budh* (to awaken, to understand) and *vid* (to know) are also significant in identifying the MSA/Bh's epistemological claims.

4. Note, however, that this term only occurs in compounds.

Since no specific definition of knowledge is offered in the MSA/Bh, it would be useful to begin by offering some definition of knowledge as a starting point for elucidating the relationship between knowledge and the soteriological vehicles according to the text. In western philosophical discourse, knowledge has sometimes been defined as justified true belief.[5] Although the definition of knowledge as justified true belief is certainly not unproblematic,[6] I will assume this definition for the purposes of attempting to see what may be said about the MSA/Bh's view of the relation of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna to knowledge in these terms.

Given the definition of knowledge as justified true belief, following Chisholm (1982: 43), I will assume that all justified true belief is propositional; that is to say, I will assume that any justified true belief may be expressed in the form of a proposition. Thus I exclude from consideration knowledge in the sense of knowledge how to, for example, attain buddhahood; our definition is concerned only with knowledge in the sense of *knowledge that p*.

Concomitant with the definition of knowledge as justified true belief is the view that one can only have knowledge that *p* if *p* is in fact true. Thus one route to discerning the relationship between knowledge and the soteriological vehicles according to the MSA/Bh, would be to identify the relationship between truth and the soteriological

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5. For an account of knowledge as justified true belief, see Chisholm 1966: 5-23 and 1982: 43-49. Note that Chisholm traces this account of knowledge back to Plato's *Theatetus* and *Meno*.

6. The most significant criticism of the definition has been Gettier's article of 1963, "Is justified true belief knowledge?", which offers counterexamples of beliefs which are justified and true, but which do not qualify as knowledge.

vehicles according to the text. But not all of the propositions attributed by the MSA/Bh to the Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna necessarily claim the status of ultimate truth. There are, of course, propositions attributed to one or the other vehicle which are considered to be provisional, in need of interpretation, intentional, conventional, etc. So in order to identify those propositions attributed to the Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna which do make a claim to ultimate truth, I will first turn to a brief examination of these hermeneutical categories.

Hermeneutical categories

The primary hermeneutical categories employed by the MSA/Bh are those of indirect intention (*abhiprāya*) and indirect implication (*abhisaṃdhi*), definitive (*nītārtha*) vs. non-definitive (*neyārtha*), and conventional (*saṃvṛti*) vs. ultimate (*paramārtha*).[7] I will review each of these from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, in order to identify the relationship between these categories and truth-claims. It should be emphasized that these categories are primarily hermeneutical, not epistemological: they are concerned with classifying propositions for the purposes of interpretation—identifying which claims should be accepted at face value, which should be interpreted indirectly, etc. Nevertheless, these hermeneutical categories are important in allowing me to identify truth-claims attributed to the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna.

7. For a fuller discussion of these categories, see Lopez 1988b.

The categories of indirect intention and indirect implication have been discussed at length elsewhere.[8] Briefly stated these categories are applied to canonical statements where the literal meaning cannot be accepted at face value. We have already seen a specific example of intention ascription in the MSA/Bh, in the chapter on *ekayāna*: whereas some Mahāyāna sūtras affirm that there is only one final, efficacious soteriological vehicle, according to the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory there are three (reducible to two) final, efficacious vehicles; thus the text cannot accept the one-vehicle doctrine at face value. The text therefore specifies that this doctrine was taught with a particular indirect intention (i.e., it refers to the vehicle of buddhas, or to the specific senses in which the three vehicles are identical) and for a particular purpose (i.e., to motivate sentient beings). Thus it is not to be accepted as literally true. So any statement that is declared to have an indirect intention or implication cannot be identified as a truth-claim. The specified indirect intention or implication itself, however, may be accepted as a truth-claim.

The categories of definitive vs. non-definitive are notable for their near absence from the MSA/Bh. In fact, the term *neyārtha* (non-definitive, in need of interpretation) does not appear to be used at all in either the verse-text or the commentary, while the term *nītārtha* is used only twice. In the commentary to 10.5, the text states that one may lack an inclination towards the Mahāyāna if one does not listen to sūtras that are definitive (*nītārtha-sūtrānta*). And at 18.31, in the context of a discussion of the four

8. See, e.g., Collier 1998, especially: 85-94, where he discusses the four indirect implications and the four indirect intentions according to MSA/Bh 12.16-18.

points of reference (*pratisaraṇa*), the verse-text states that the definitive meaning is established by a valid means of knowledge (i.e., it is *prāmāṇika*). Neither of these text-locations, however, identifies any specific content to definitive teachings, thus no specific truth-claims are related to this hermeneutical category in the MSA/Bh.

Perhaps the most well-known hermeneutical distinction in Buddhism is that between conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramārtha-satya*). The distinction between the conventional and ultimate, and its relation to ontology, was discussed at some length in the previous chapter. Briefly stated, we might say that for the Mahāyāna, a conventional truth is any proposition that is made from the perspective of phenomena, which identifies interrelationships in patterns of phenomena in an efficacious way. That is to say, a conventional truth is understood as a proposition about the phenomenal world of sentient beings which is useful in aiding sentient beings to act in or manipulate the worid in a causally efficacious manner. At 11.16, conventional truth is identified as the perception of unreal objects;[9] according to conventional truth, phenomena are taken to be independently existing objects with inherent natures. Furthermore, as stated in the previous chapter, at MSA 1.12 the scope of logic is said to be conventional truth, not ultimate truth. Thus we may see that in the context of the MSA/Bh, conventional truth encompasses well-reasoned propositions about the world of phenomena, which take the given phenomena to be actually existent. Ultimate truth, on the other hand, is understood to be from the perspective of ultimate reality. According to

9. MSABh ad 11.16: yathā tasya māyā-kṛtasya hastyādi-bhāvenopalabdhis tathābhūta-parikalpasya saṃvṛti-satyatopalabdhiḥ/. This verse and its commentary were discussed in Chapter 11.

the MSA/Bh's conception of ultimate truth, there are no phenomena whatsoever that may even be identified; all phenomena are without self and empty of inherent nature.[10] And since ultimate truth is understood to be from the perspective of ultimate reality—from the perspective of the way things really are—we may identify any such proposition as a truth-claim, and thus as a candidate for knowledge.

In what follows I will identify and discuss claims to ultimate truth attributed by the MSA/Bh to the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. Since the hermeneutical distinction of conventional truth vs. ultimate truth is relatively clear in the MSA/Bh, and since the text specifically relates certain propositions to ultimate truth, I will focus on that hermeneutical category in my examination of the relationship between knowledge and the soteriological vehicles.

Ultimate truth-claims

Ultimate truth for the Mahāyāna has already been identified with the claim that all phenomena are without self and empty of inherent nature (MSA 18.101ab). The text also relates ultimate truth to the following: (1) suffering,[11] (2) non-duality,[12] (3) the identity between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,[13] and (4) buddhahood, the perfected, thusness, or ultimate

10. See MSA 18.101ab, translated in the previous chapter.

11. MSABh ad 5.8 states that the characteristic of suffering (*duḥkhatva*) is ultimately true (*paramārtha*).

12. See MSA 6.1, referred to in the previous chapter.

13. See MSABh ad 6.5, translated and discussed in Chapter 4.

reality itself.[14] It is not difficult to see, however, how these four claims may be related to the former claim. If all phenomena are empty, then it follows that at the conventional level they are involved with suffering; that ultimately there is non-duality; that phenomena such as saṃsāra and nirvāṇa share the same ultimate nature; and that ultimate reality may be identified with ultimate truth, since both, when considered from the perspective of phenomena, are identified with the emptiness of all phenomena. So we may conclude that according to the MSA/Bh, the proposition that all phenomena are empty is the principal claim to ultimate truth on the part of the Mahāyāna. Furthermore, since this claim is explicitly made by the MSA/Bh, any other Mahāyāna claims to ultimate truth must either be compatible with or reducible to this claim.

No specific claim to ultimate truth is directly attributed to the Hīnayāna by the MSA/Bh. We may, however, posit that the MSA/Bh would maintain that the proposition "there is an absence of self in persons" is a claim to ultimate truth on the part of the Hīnayāna. The reason this may be posited is the following. The realization of the absence of self in persons is identified by the text as the cause of the awakening of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, just as the realization of the absence of self in both persons and phenomena is identified as the cause of the awakening of bodhisattvas.[15] Since the latter realization is specified as a claim to ultimate truth on the part of the Mahāyāna, we may infer that the former realization may be specified as a claim to

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14. This point was discussed in the previous chapter. Also see MSABh ad 20-21.60: tatra viśuddhā tathatā niṣpannaḥ paramārthaḥ/.

15. See MSABh ad 19.50, translated and discussed in Chapter 6.

ultimate truth on the part of the Hīnayāna. (The idea here is that when one is awakened, one is awakened to—or attains knowledge of—the ultimate truth.)

If we posit the content of Hīnayāna awakening as a claim to ultimate truth on the part of the Hīnayāna, we may infer at least one more claim to ultimate truth attributable to that vehicle. According to the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna holds that there is an absence of self in persons, but it does not hold that there is an absence of self in phenomena—phenomena are taken to exist in some way. Thus according to the Hīnayāna, existence may be distinguished from non-existence; existence is comprised of continua of momentary events or phenomena (*dharmas*), which themselves have some form of inherent nature or essence (*svabhāva*). We may reasonably infer that this would be another claim to ultimate truth attributed to the Hīnayāna by the MSA/Bh, since at 11.23 the text states that through comprehending the absolute (*aikāntikatva*) non-distinction between existence and non-existence, one avoids going by the Hīnayāna (which implies, of course, that the Hīnayāna posits a distinction between existence and non-existence).[16]

We may summarize the investigation of claims to ultimate truth as follows. From the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna ultimately posits that: (1) there is an absence of self in all phenomena (i.e., all phenomena are empty of inherent nature). And according to our reading of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna ultimately posits that: (2) there is an absence of self in persons, and (3) existence and non-existence are ultimately distinct. While there may certainly be further claims to ultimate truth attributed to the Mahāyāna

16. MSA/Bh 11.23 was translated and discussed in Chapter 11.

or Hīnayāna, one route to understanding the relationship between knowledge and the soteriological vehicles according to the MSA/Bh would be to focus on the relationship between (1) on the one hand, and (2) and (3) on the other. Thus far, it is apparent that the MSA/Bh holds (1) to be ultimately true, and thus the proposition that all phenomena are empty of inherent nature is a truth-claim on the part of the MSA/Bh. And since (1) is made from the perspective of the Mahāyāna, we might say that according to the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna is based on a fundamentally true proposition. But what about the Hīnayāna? Are propositions (2) and (3) also true according to the MSA/Bh?

Since (2) is contained by (1), it is quite clear that (2) must also be true according to the MSA/Bh: if all phenomena are empty of inherent nature, then it is certainly the case that there is an absence of self in persons (i.e., that persons are empty of inherent nature). But (3), on the other hand, stands in contradiction to the fundamental claim of the Mahāyāna: if all phenomena are without inherent nature, then ultimately no distinctions can be upheld, including the distinction between existence and non-existence. Therefore (3) cannot be ultimately true according to the MSA/Bh. So while (2) is true from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, (3) is not.

Recalling our initial definition of knowledge as justified true belief, if we assume that propositions (1) and (2) are not only true according to the MSA/Bh, but also justified—in the sense that the propositions are affirmed for properly evidenced reasons—then we can conclude that propositions (1) and (2) qualify as knowledge from the perspective of the text. Thus according to the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna encompasses at least some propositional knowledge, but it also encompasses some propositions that are

not, strictly speaking, true. And to the extent that the Hīnayāna does encompass propositional knowledge, that knowledge is also contained by the Mahāyāna. Furthermore, the knowledge encompassed by the Mahāyāna extends beyond the limits of that encompassed by the Hīnayāna. Thus with regard to propositional knowledge, from the perspective of the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna is understood to be more comprehensive than the Hīnayāna.

Knowledge as an immediate awareness

Although the conclusions reached thus far are, I think, valid, it should be recalled that they proceeded from the premise that knowledge be defined as justified true belief. This premise is useful in interpreting the MSA/Bh's arrangement of the relationship between knowledge and the soteriological vehicles from the perspective of one possible account of knowledge. But our conclusions remain, nevertheless, somewhat unsatisfactory in that the MSA/Bh itself does not proceed from this definition of knowledge: in the MSA/Bh knowledge is not defined as justified true belief,[17] and in fact knowledge does not seem to be understood in propositional terms at all.

The MSA/Bh makes a number of interesting claims to the effect that all propositions, even those made by the Mahāyāna, are illusory and ultimately unable to describe or characterize reality. Reality itself is said to be inexpressible. At 11.13 reality (*tattva*) is described as unable to be expressed and without the nature of discursivity

17. See Potter 1984, especially: 309, where he states that a "justified true belief account of knowledge" is "foreign to Indian thought."

(*aprapañcātmaka*). And in the commentary to 11.41 the perfected characteristic (another term for ultimate reality) is said to be without conceptual discrimination (*avikalpa*) since it is not discursive (*niṣprapañcatā*). Words and propositions are not understood to refer to actual objects; rather, they are taken to be mental constructions, and all mental constructions are considered to be ultimately unreal. And this includes Buddhist teachings themselves: at 11.28 the verse-text states that the doctrines (*dharma*) offered as an antidote to the afflictions are like an illusion (*māyopama*); the commentary explains this to mean that they are non-existent (*avidyamāna*). The next verse (11.29) continues with this theme, and states that all doctrines are like one illusory king defeating another.[18] Furthermore, 13.2 offers the well-known Buddhist trope that all doctrines are like a raft. Thus the MSA/Bh does not directly link propositions to knowledge, and instead emphasizes the illusory nature of all propositions.

In the final analysis, the MSA/Bh understands knowledge to be a species of awareness: it is an awareness that is unmediated by any form of conceptualization, wherein phenomenal content is directly present to that awareness itself. Consider, for example, the MSA/Bh's interpretation of buddhahood as an awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance (MSA/Bh 20-21.58), along with the interpretation of buddhahood as a non-constructive awareness (*nirvikalpa-jñāna*; MSA/Bh 9.56). Taking the awareness of all objects of knowledge to be the most complete form of knowledge possible, it can be seen that perfect knowledge—i.e.,

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18. MSA 11.29: māyā-rājeva cānyena māyā-rājñā parājitaḥ/ ya sarva-dharmān paśyanti nirmārās te jinātmajāḥ//.

omniscience—must be unmediated by any form of conceptual construction. Conceptual constructions are ultimately unreal, according to the text, so knowledge cannot be understood in propositional terms, since propositions themselves are a form of conceptual construction. Rather, knowledge is understood to occur when an object is directly present to awareness without any form of conceptual mediation. This point may also be seen in the MSA/Bh's conception of the afflictive and cognitive obstructions blocking the attainment of omniscience (mediation blocks knowledge); and in the concept of mirror-awareness perfectly reflecting objects of knowledge (without the distortions of mediation). Thus in the context of the MSA/Bh, knowledge is properly understood as a form of awareness.[19]

The Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, then, are not understood to encompass knowledge. Rather, these vehicles are viewed as systems of discourse and practice intending to bring about certain specified results (respectively, buddhahood and nirvāṇa without residual conditioning). Since knowledge is understood as a form of unmediated awareness, and since the Mahāyāna leads to an omniscient form of unmediated awareness, it can be seen that according to the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna may be viewed as a means to knowledge. Thus while the Mahāyāna is not understood to encompass knowledge (in the way that knowledge is understood in the context of the MSA/Bh), it is understood to lead to the most perfect form of knowledge possible.

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19. This point should come as no surprise since one of the most important terms under consideration here, *jñāna*, may be translated as both "knowledge" and "awareness."

Put in other terms, according to the MSA/Bh, Buddhist teachings do not describe reality: properly speaking reality is indescribable. Instead, the teachings may be said to show, point out, or indicate reality (*tattva-darśika*; MSA 12.5). And reality may be pointed out or indicated to a greater or lesser extent. The Hīnayāna, on this reading of the MSA/Bh, points out reality in an only limited way; it does not indicate, for example, that object of knowledge that is not imagined: thusness, or supramundane awareness. The Mahāyāna, on the other hand, is understood to point out reality in its entirety. Buddhist teachings, from the MSA/Bh's perspective, are not primarily descriptive; rather they are primarily prescriptive: they identify the way in which reality should be viewed if certain objectives are to be obtained. The investigation of reality is not taken to be an end in itself, but rather is understood as a means to soteriological attainment. Even the investigation of reality through conventional and ultimate truth is said to be a means (*upāya*).[20] And the ultimate soteriological attainment of the Mahāyāna, according to the text, is perfect knowledge. So from the MSA/Bh's perspective, the Mahāyāna identifies how reality should be viewed in order to arrive at a direct, unmediated, omniscient awareness.

In the context of this discussion of the relationship between knowledge and the Buddhist soteriological vehicles, the central concern of the MSA/Bh comes to the fore. The stated purpose of the text is to aid sentient beings in overcoming suffering—which is

20. MSABh ad 11.78: upāya-māhātmyam ugra-vīryatayā saṃvṛti-paramārtha-satya-dharmatā-paryeṣaṇataś/.

a soteriological purpose.[21] The text's objective, then, is not to provide a theoretically true description of reality—i.e., to offer knowledge in a propositional sense. Rather, the objective is to provide a description of reality that is practically (i.e., soteriologically) efficacious—i.e., to describe reality in a way that will lead to the occurrence of knowledge, in the sense of a direct, unmediated awareness. Thus while the Buddhist vehicles are thought to lead to knowledge, they are not considered to comprise it. And on the MSA/Bh's reading, the Mahāyāna is the superior vehicle since it is understood to lead to the most perfect form of knowledge possible: omniscient awareness.

21. See MSA 1.1, translated in Chapter 2.

Chapter 15
Soteriological considerations

Introduction

The discussion in this chapter will center around two terms: purification soteriology and gnosis soteriology. If a soteriology is a system of thought which diagnoses sentient existence in terms of some fundamentally disordered or disturbed condition, and which offers a prescription for the termination of that disordered condition, a purification soteriology identifies the disordered condition as some form of impurity, defilement, affliction, etc. A gnosis soteriology on the other hand identifies the disordered condition as some form of pervasive ignorance or as the absence of some form of fundamental knowledge or awareness. For a purification soteriology salvation consists in the elimination of all forms of impurity, defilement, etc., while for a gnosis soteriology salvation consists in the presence of a specific form of knowledge or awareness. An example of a purification soteriology may be seen in the Jaina conception of karma as particles of material substance that attach themselves to the soul, and thus bind one to the cycle of saṃsāra: here the root problem is the defilement brought about by karma, and salvation is purification from this karmic material. And an example of a gnosis soteriology may be seen in the Sāṃkhya conception of the separateness of *puruṣa* (the soul or pure consciousness) from *prakṛti* (matter or material existence): here the root problem is ignorance of the truth that the soul is always distinct from matter, and salvation is the realization of this truth. Of course while a soteriological system may identify the root problem as both impurity and ignorance, the notions of purification

soteriology and gnosis soteriology are ideal-typical forms and need not always be identifiable in an entirely exclusive way in order to be useful concepts.

The point that I will argue in this chapter—and the reason why I introduce the idea of two types of soteriology—is that within the context of the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna may be characterized as a purification soteriology, while the Mahāyāna may be characterized as a gnosis soteriology. Thus one way to interpret the distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna in the MSA/Bh is in terms of the difference in types of soteriology that each vehicle represents. Before moving on to this specific point, however, I wish to situate my discussion within the context of two other studies of Buddhist soteriology.

Two theories of salvation and two traditions of meditation

The distinction between purification soteriology and gnosis soteriology is related to, though not identical with, La Vallée Poussin's distinction between theories of salvation in Buddhism, and Bronkhorst's distinction between traditions of meditation in ancient India. In his article "Musīla et Nārada" La Vallée Poussin discusses two opposed theories of salvation in Indian Buddhism: salvation through intellectual realization vs. salvation through ascetic and ecstatic practices.[1] And in his study <u>The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India</u> Bronkhorst opposes what he terms "mainstream meditation"

1. See La Vallée Poussin 1937: 189-190, "On peut, sans imprudence, discerner dans les sources bouddhiques, anciennes ou scolastiques, deux théories opposées . . . : la théorie qui fait du salut une oeuvre purement ou surtout intellectuelle; la théorie qui met le salut au bout des disciplines ascétiques et extatiques."

to early Buddhist meditation.[2] Bronkhorst, however, identifies two distinct branches within mainstream meditation. I will limit myself only to considerations regarding those two distinct branches, and not concern myself with his hypotheses regarding early Buddhist meditation. First I turn to La Vallée Poussin's article.

In "Musīla et Nārada" La Vallée Poussin is concerned with identifying the extent to which one or the other of the two theories of salvation (intellectual vs. ascetic/ecstatic) is emphasized in the schools of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika and of Harivarman. He states that an arhat is one who has suppressed and totally eradicated all of the vices (*āsrava*, i.e., those phenomena which bind one to saṃsāra) and defilements (*kleśa*, a term which I have usually translated as "afflictions").[3] So here we are in the context of a purification soteriology, one in which the root problem of sentient existence is characterized as a form of impurity or defilement. In examining the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika, La Vallée Poussin (1937: 193) states that the school identifies two types of defilements:

> 1. *kleśas* de l'ordre intellectuel, les 'vues' (*dṛṣṭi*), les 'erreurs', l'abreration (*moha*): la croyance au 'je', etc.; 2. *kleśas* de l'ordre émotif, qui sont dans notre langue les 'passions', à savoir l'aversion et le désir. — Détruire les 'erreurs' n'est pas détruire les 'passions': pour avoir reconnu le caractère impermanent et nocif des choses agréables, l'ascète continue cependant à les trouver agréables et à les désirer.

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2. Bronkhorst (1986: 47) states, "There can be no doubt that the early Jaina and Hindu scriptures describe forms of meditation which belong to the same tradition. Therefore we shall speak of *main stream meditation*."

3. In discussing La Vallée Poussin's article, I will translate *āsrava* as "vices" since he uses the French term *vices*, and I will translate *kleśa* as "defilements," since he uses the term *souillures*.

Thus according to the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika there are both intellectual and emotional defilements. Removing intellectual defilements—defilements of view—is not adequate for attaining salvation and becoming an arhat; the emotional defilements—the passions—still remain, and it is only when these emotional defilements are completely suppressed and destroyed, in even their subtle or latent forms, that liberation can be attained. Thus, La Vallée Poussin states, first one removes the intellectual defilements on the path of vision (*darśana-mārga*), then one removes the emotional defilements on the path of cultivation (*bhāvanā-mārga*).[4] So in this soteriological scheme, correcting one's views through right knowledge is preliminary to the removal of the emotional defilements in all their forms.

La Vallée Poussin indicates, however, that for Harivarman, while concentration (*samādhi*) is necessary for salvation, meditation (*dhyāna*) is not. Thus according to Harivarman, there are some arhats who are delivered by wisdom, or by intellectual realization. Quoting Harivarman, La Vallée Poussin translates (1937: 204):

> En outre, il est dit dans le Susīmasūtra: 'D'abord *dharmasthitijñāna*, ensuite *nirvāṇe jñāna*', ce qui veut dire qu'il n'est pas nécessaire d'obtenir d'abord la concentration de *dhyāna* pour arriver ensuite à la destruction des vices (*āsravakṣaya*); il faut seulement, au moyen du préalable *dharmasthitijñāna*, arriver à la destruction des vices.

So it is not necessary to enter into the stages of meditation (*dhyāna*) in order to attain liberation; it is only necessary to first attain *dharmasthitijñāna*, which is defined as knowledge of the production of phenomena (1937: 207). When this knowledge occurs,

4. Collett Cox ("Attainment through abandonment: the Sarvāstivāda path of removing defilements" in Buswell and Gimello 1992: 63-105) points out, however, that for the Sarvāstivāda, the path of vision is not

liberation—the destruction of the vices—is attained. So while the ultimate goal is the destruction of the vices (*āsrava-kṣaya*), this goal may be reached through a specific insight into the nature of phenomena.

What I wish to note regarding La Vallée Poussin's article is that both theories of salvation (intellectual realization vs. ascetic/ecstatic practices) are placed within the context of a purification soteriology. The theory of attaining liberation through intellectual realization does not correspond to the type of the gnosis soteriology, as one might expect. Rather, liberation through intellectual realization, as described by La Vallée Poussin, is one route (or sub-route) to the goal of liberation within the context of a purification soteriology. To restate the difference between La Vallée Poussin's two theories of salvation and my two forms of soteriology, while La Vallée Poussin's distinction is concerned with the question of *how liberation is attained* (e.g., through intellectual realization, through ascetic/ecstatic practices, or through a combination of both), my distinction is concerned with the question of *how liberation is defined* (e.g., liberation is purification from all forms of defilement, or liberation is the gnosis of the way things really are). And there is no strict correlation between how liberation is defined and how it may be attained: for example, if liberation is defined as purification, it might be specified that purification is attained through intellectual realization, through ascetic/ecstatic practices, or, in other contexts, through tantric practices, devotion to a deity, etc.

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the exclusive domain of vision, knowledge, and insight, and the path of cultivation is not the exclusive domain of trance, meditation, and repeated practice.

In The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India Bronkhorst examines various Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu texts in order to identify what early Buddhist meditation consisted in. He posits that Buddhist meditation may be distinguished from what he calls mainstream meditation, and concludes that both forms of meditation mutually influenced one another to some degree, but that Buddhist meditation was more influenced by mainstream meditation than the reverse. As mentioned earlier, here I will concern myself only with Bronkhorst's interpretation of mainstream meditation, and not with his specific theses regarding early Buddhist meditation. Furthermore, I should note that while Bronkhorst wishes to make claims about actual religious practices in ancient India, I wish only to make a claim about representations that appear in the MSA/Bh. Nevertheless, I think a brief review of some of his hypotheses will be quite useful in helping me to elucidate my point.

In his examination of Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu texts, Bronkhorst concludes that mainstream meditation centered around the notion of eliminating, or purifying oneself from, the negative effects of karma (1986: 26):

> Certain non-Buddhist ascetics, in particular the Jainas, performed practices which are described as 'non-performing of new actions' and 'annihilation of former actions by asceticism'. . . . The common denominator in all these practices is easily discerned. All of them aim at non-activity of a part, or of the whole, of the aspirant. Given the fact that many of the religious movements in the time of the Buddha and later strove to discard the evil consequences of activity (*karman*), this goal should not surprise us.

What Bronkhorst describes here as one dominant branch within mainstream (i.e., non-Buddhist) meditation is what I would characterize as a purification soteriology. In this branch of mainstream meditation the root problem of sentient existence is identified as

the evil consequences of action (*karma*). So here salvation may be defined as purification from these evil consequences. With regard to how salvation is attained according to this form of "mainstream tradition," Bronkhorst specifies a number of practices directed towards the annihilation of past and future action through asceticism, i.e., the complete cessation of all bodily and mental activity, culminating in the case of some Jaina texts with a fast till death.

Bronkhorst also identifies another branch of mainstream meditation; he states that according to this branch of mainstream meditation (1986: 51):

> Liberation from the results of one's actions is possible because in reality no actions are ever performed. They are not performed because man's inner self, his soul, is completely different from his body and never acts. . . . It is sufficient to *know* that in reality one never performs any actions.

This branch of mainstream meditation is what I would characterize as a gnosis soteriology: here the root problem of sentient existence is identified as ignorance of the truth that the soul never engages in any action whatsoever, and hence that one's true self is never implicated with impurity or suffering in the first place. In this branch of mainstream meditation, salvation may be defined as the realization of the truth that the soul is distinct from action, or the gnosis that one's inner self is always already free from action and its consequences. And the gnosis that comprises salvation may be attained through the discipline of knowledge (*jñāna-yoga*) or through some combination of knowledge and ascetic practices.[5]

5. Bronkhorst cites examples that involve both knowledge and asceticism from the *Āpastambīya-dharma-sūtra*, the *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, and the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*; see 1986: 53-54.

While the studies of Buddhist soteriology of La Vallée Poussin and Bronkhorst are quite useful, both would, I think, benefit from more clearly distinguishing the issue of the definition of salvation from that of the identification of the means to its attainment. For example, what La Vallée Poussin identifies as two theories of salvation would be better understood as two theories of the means to the attainment of salvation. Both theories that La Vallée Poussin discusses—salvation through intellectual realization and salvation through ascetic/ecstatic practices[6]—are set within a context in which salvation is defined as purification from the vices (*āsrava*) and defilements (*kleśa*); that is to say, they fall within the parameters of a purification soteriology. Bronkhorst's study also fails to clarify the distinction between the definition of salvation and the identification of the means to its attainment. What Bronkhorst groups together as a unified tradition of mainstream meditation, or as "direct and consistent answers to the belief that action leads to misery and rebirth" (1986: 124), would be better interpreted as two distinct theories about the very definition of salvation. The first branch—salvation as the annihilation of all action—may be understood as a purification soteriology, while the second branch—salvation as the realization that the self is already divorced from all action—may be understood as a gnosis soteriology. Viewing matters in this way allows the focus to be turned away from the determination of actual meditative practices (a task that is at best hypothetical) and towards the interpretation of conceptualizations of salvation that appear in specific texts (which is, after all, the focus of this study).

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6. Here, the term "enstatic" would be preferable to "ecstatic" since the goal is withdrawal from all external sensory contact, conceptualization, and feeling; see Griffiths 1986: 149, note 27.

Purification soteriology vs. gnosis soteriology

In the chapter on *vimukti* I discussed the MSA/Bh's claim that the Hīnayāna leads to the removal of the afflictive obstructions (*kleśāvaraṇa*), while the Mahāyāna leads to the removal of both the afflictive and the cognitive obstructions (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). There I also discussed the semantic point that while the term *kleśāvaraṇa* is best understood as an appositional compound (a type of *karmadhāraya*) meaning "obstructions which are afflictions," *jñeyāvaraṇa* is best understood as a syntactic compound (a *tatpuruṣa*) meaning "obstructions in the way of objects of knowledge." Thus the Hīnayāna is said to remove obstructions which are afflictions, while the Mahāyāna is said to remove afflictive obstructions as well as obstructions to objects of knowledge. For the Hīnayāna, then, salvation consists in the annihilation of afflictions or impurities that contribute to the process of conditioned cyclic existence. In other terms, from the MSA/Bh's perspective, the Hīnayāna represents a purification soteriology. For the Mahāyāna, on the other hand, salvation does not consist in the annihilation of impurities alone; it also consists in the removal of cognitive obstructions, since the Mahāyāna interpretation of salvation is the attainment of omniscience, the awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance. Thus, in the context of the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna represents a gnosis soteriology.

The interpretation of the Mahāyāna as a gnosis soteriology is also supported by the MSA/Bh's view that according to the Mahāyāna, reality is already naturally pure.[7] If

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7. This point was discussed in Chapter 13.

reality itself is naturally pure—if the afflictions or defilements are only adventitious—then there would be no real need to purify reality of defilement (salvation is not fundamentally a form of purification). What is necessary, on this view, is only to realize that the defilements are not intrinsic to reality itself, that reality is a non-dual awareness of thusness; thus Mahāyāna salvation is fundamentally understood to be a form of gnosis.

The MSA/Bh's interpretation of Hīnayāna soteriology correlates well with La Vallée Poussin's claims regarding the conception of salvation in the schools of the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika and of Harivarman: for them, according to La Vallée Poussin, salvation consists in the annihilation of all vices and defilements, just as for the Hīnayāna, according to the MSA/Bh, salvation consists in the annihilation of the afflictive obstructions. As for the Mahāyāna conception of salvation, it is formally similar to the second branch of mainstream meditation discussed by Bronkhorst. Whereas for mainstream Jaina and Hindu meditation, one form of salvation is the direct gnosis of the soul or inner self as divorced from all action, for the MSA/Bh, the Mahāyāna form of salvation is an unmediated gnosis of thusness—i.e., of reality itself.

Therapeutics vs. metaphysics

Here I would like to relate the distinction between purification soteriology and gnosis soteriology to the distinction I introduced earlier between the Hīnayāna as the therapeutic vehicle and the Mahāyāna as the metaphysical vehicle. Recall that according to the MSA/Bh, Hīnayāna salvation consists in purification from the *kleśas* (afflictions, defilements). Thus Hīnayāna salvation is defined as the removal of those phenomena

which are constitutive of the condition of cyclic existence. This conception of salvation may be correlated with the conception of a therapeutic vehicle—that is, a soteriological vehicle directed towards the termination of the fundamental malady of sentient existence. For the Hīnayāna, the root problem of sentient existence is affliction (*kleśa*), and so salvation consists in purification from affliction. So according to the MSA/Bh, the Hīnayāna has a therapeutic aim: it provides effective therapy for the termination of the disease of suffering. Mahāyāna salvation, on the other hand, is said to consist in an unmediated gnosis of thusness—of ultimate reality itself—which is identified as the omniscient state of buddhahood. And given the non-dualism of the MSA/Bh, the gnosis of reality must be assimilated to that same reality. So the Mahāyāna is directed towards the attainment of reality in the widest possible sense, and thus may be characterized as a metaphysical vehicle.

While I have here characterized the MSA/Bh's conception of the Mahāyāna as a gnosis soteriology and its conception of the Hīnayāna as a purification soteriology, it remains to be seen to what extent this distinction may or may not be useful in characterizing constructions of the Mahāyāna more generally.

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THE MAHĀYĀNA-HĪNAYĀNA DISTINCTION IN THE *MAHĀYĀNASŪTRĀLAṂKĀRA*: A TERMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

VOLUME TWO

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Chapter 16
General conclusion

In his introduction to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, Sylvain Lévi (1911: *16-*19) reflects on the doctrines offered in the text, and the possible sources for and influences upon those doctrines. He refers to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, which he takes to be the fundamental work of the Mahāyāna, as the "twin sister of the Wisdom (*la Sophia*) and Gnosis (*la Gnose*) of Greek Asia" (ibid., *18). Considering Asaṅga to be the author of the text, Lévi places him in Gandhāra, a region in direct contact with the Iranian world, which Lévi describes as ripe with vigorous forms of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Manichaeism. He even speculates that the role of the defilements (*souillures*) and cleansing (*nettoyage*) in Asaṅga's work is a reflection of Manichaeism (*est un reflet du manichéisme*; ibid.).

Edward Conze, in an article published more than a half-century after Lévi's introduction, traces out eight major and twenty-three minor similarities between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Hellenistic, Near Eastern forms of Gnosis.[1] The similarities Conze identifies range from a belief that "*salvation* takes place through *gnōsis* or *jñāna*, and nothing else can finally achieve it," to a "teaching concerning the *levels of spiritual attainment*," and "the crucial role which *Wisdom* plays in both systems" (1995: 174-176). Conze hypothesizes that these similarities may be the result of mutual borrowing, or

1. In the introduction to this article, Conze states that in 1828, Isaac Jacob Schmidt published a pamphlet titled "Über die Verwandtschaft der gnostisch-theosophischen Lehren mit den Religionssystemen des Orients, vorzüglich dem Buddhaismus" ["On the relation of the gnostic-theosophical teachings to the religious systems of the Orient, particularly Buddhism"] which, according to Conze, Arthur Schopenhauer recommended three times in his collected works; Conze 1995: 173 (originally published in 1970).

either joint or parallel development; but he reasonably concludes that as of yet there is no definite solution to the problem.

Research has certainly indicated some historical relations between Buddhism and at least one form of Gnosis—viz., Manichaeism. Mani identified the Buddha as one of the "apostles of light," along with Zoroaster, Jesus, and others (Rudolph 1983: 132);[2] late in the seventh century, Manichaeans appeared at the Chinese imperial court, and competed with Buddhists, Taoists, and Nestorians (ibid., 332); Manichaean texts were available in Chinese by the beginning of the eighth century (Couliano 1992: 33), and it has been remarked that these translations are "filled with Buddhist terminology" (ibid., 186, note 73); Manichaeism is known to have existed in Central Asia alongside forms of Buddhism, and in the eighth century Manichaeism became the state religion of the Uighur Empire (ibid., 33); furthermore, Central Asian Manichaeans adopted Buddhist terminology, as well as Buddhist narrative and artistic material (Klimkeit 1998a: 238-239).[3] Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, a scholar of Central Asian Manichaeism, has gone so far as to say that (ibid., 238):

> Basically the entire history of eastern Manichaeism is determined by the contact with Buddhism, and thus it is understandable that in Central Asia the Manichaeans adopted Buddhist forms and content. The adoption process is also understandable on the basis of the comparable *Daseinshaltung* ("attitude to existence") of both religions. For both religions, the world is a place of woe and suffering.

2. Rudolph also states that "Mani himself journeyed in 241 by boat to India and up the Indus valley to Turan" (1983: 330).

3. Klimkeit (1998b: 254) states, "The use of the Parthian verb *pariniβrād*, 'went into *parinirvāṇa*', for Jesus' entry into the Realm of Light illustrates the marked tendency on the part of eastern Manichaeism to adapt to Buddhist parlance and, moreover, to transpose Gnostic concepts into those of the Indian religion."

Thus it is clear that Buddhism has exerted some influence on Central Asian Manichaeism. Nevertheless, despite Lévi's suggestion, it is thus far not apparent that any *genetic* relationship has been established between Manichaeism and any form of Mahāyāna Buddhism.[4]

In my analysis of the Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, I have referred to the MSA/Bh's construction of the Mahāyāna as a "gnosis soteriology." The term *gnosis* may normally be translated as "knowledge," but in his study of the term in Greek, Hellenistic, and biblical literature, Bultmann remarks (1952: 4-5):

> Ultimate truth for the Greeks means the reality which underlies all appearances, and this determines the nature of knowledge of the truth. The Greek ideal of knowledge becomes clear when it is understood that knowing is a kind of seeing.

The term *gnosis* may thus be seen to connote a type of knowledge whose nature is determined by ultimate truth (a term we may felicitously translate into Sanskrit as *paramārtha-satya*), which is the reality underlying appearances (or in the MSA/Bh's terms, the *tattva* which is not covered by unreal imagination—*abhūta-parikalpa*—which is to say, the perfected nature—*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*). Bultmann also states that "Gnosis endows the Gnostic with the divine nature, i.e. primarily, with immortality" (ibid., 13). We may see this as quite analogous to the MSA/Bh's conception that the attainment of omniscience, or the awareness of all objects of knowledge and all modes of appearance (*sarva-jñeya-sarvākāra-jñāna*), is the attainment of the real body of buddhahood (the *dharma-kāya*), which is understood to be eternal. While the MSA/Bh's

4. Regarding Lévi's speculation that the MSA's concern with *souillures* and *nettoyage* is *un reflet du manichéisme*, I think this may more simply be understood as a reflection of the concerns of abhidharma.

theory of salvation is certainly quite different from the theories of Hellenistic, Near Eastern forms of Gnosis in many important respects, I think a case can be made for adopting the Greek term (in its uncapitalized form) and describing the MSA/Bh's construction of the Mahāyāna as a gnosis soteriology.

But may the description of the Mahāyāna as a gnosis soteriology be seen to have wider applicability? May it be useful to describe the Mahāyāna more generally as a form of gnosis soteriology? And further, may it be useful to describe the Hīnayāna more generally as a purification soteriology? Before we can even consider what would count as evidence for answering such questions, some reflection on the terms "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" are in order.

A useful entry point here would be Cohen's article on the categories "Hīnayāna" and "Mahāyāna."[5] Cohen points out that while, "Of all the categories through which to reconstruct Indian Buddhism's history, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are the most productive," there are certain taxonomical difficulties with these categories (1995: 20). He begins, for example, with Bechert's distinction between the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna: while the former is, according to be Bechert, "not to be conceived as a 'sect'," the latter is considered to comprise a variety of sects.[6] Cohen indicates, however, a problem with taxonomies like the one offered by Bechert. Turning to epigraphical evidence, Cohen identifies an inscription in Cave 22 of the Ajaṇṭā complex which seems

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5. See Cohen 1995: "Discontented categories: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in Indian Buddhist history."

6. Bechert 1973: 11: "The so-called 'sects,' i.e. the nikāyas or vādas, on the other hand had come into being *inside* the development of Hīnayāna or Śrāvakayāna" [italics mine].

to fall on both sides of the Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna divide. He translates the inscription as follows (1995: 11):

> Success! This is the religious donation of the *Śākyabhikṣu Aparaśaila* . . . for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by [my] parents [and] all sentient beings . . .

The first point to note regarding this inscription is that according to the criteria offered by Schopen in his important article on "Mahāyāna in Indian inscriptions," we may quite confidently identify this inscription as Mahāyānist: the donor is identified as a *śākyabhikṣu*, a term used only in reference to Mahāyānists (Schopen 1979: 10ff.); and the donation is dedicated for the attainment of unexcelled knowledge—*anuttara-jñāna* (ibid., 4ff.). A second point to note regarding the inscription, however, is that it also identifies the donor as an Aparaśaila, that is to say, a member of one of the sects, or nikāyas, which Bechert's taxonomy would describe as part of the Hīnayāna. How is this apparent taxonomical difficulty to be resolved?

Cohen, in the conclusion of his article, recommends that the distinction "Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna" be retained by contemporary western interpreters of Buddhism, with the proviso that it be understood that there is not one Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna distinction, but rather there are many, and that different Mahāyāna-Hīnayāna taxonomies may be usefully employed in different contexts. Thus, "Cave 22's donor can be both a 'Mahāyānist' and a 'Hīnayānist,' albeit not within the same taxonomic moment" (Cohen 1995: 21). I, however, would recommend another approach.

Although I do not agree with Bechert's taxonomy, I do agree with the contention, "That Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect' is settled by unambiguous textual evidence" (1973: 11). Early Indian evidence for the use of the term (both textual and

epigraphical), does not seem to indicate that "Mahāyāna" specifically refers to particular monastic communities, lineages of ordination, hierarchical organizational arrangements, or the like.[7] Rather, "Mahāyāna" seems to refer to certain forms of Buddhist discourse and practice—forms directed towards the attainment of buddhahood.[8] Note, however, that this claim in no way rules out Schopen's (1975) hypothesis that the Mahāyāna was initially a group of loosely related "cults of the book"; in fact, it may even support it: the Mahāyāna does not initially refer to new monastic lineages, etc., but rather to new forms of discourse and practice developing within already existing monastic communities, lineages of ordination, etc.[9]

What can be said about the category "Hīnayāna"? It should be remarked at the outset that mapping the Hīnayāna is *not* formally similar to mapping the Mahāyāna. It is decidedly *not* the same thing as mapping non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. Mapping the Hīnayāna is, rather, tracing the contours of a discursive construction deployed by individuals endeavoring to develop a new, particular Buddhist identity: a Mahāyāna identity. And given the historical context in which this new identity was formed, a

7. Note that I think we may most usefully employ the term "sect" to pick out such particular monastic communities, lineages of ordination, hierarchical organizational arrangements, etc.—in short, "sect" may most usefully be employed to refer to forms of social institutions.

8. On these points, see Williams 1989: 1-33, especially: 25: "As Buddhahood became supreme over Arhatship, so attaining Buddhahood, and therefore becoming a Bodhisattva, became the new religious goal advocated for all Buddhist practitioners. This, if anything, characterizes the Mahāyāna." Also see Harrison 1987: 73: "The rarity of the terms *mahāyāna* and *bodhisattvayāna* [in the earliest extant versions of Mahāyāna texts] already invites the conclusion that at this stage there was no rigid division of the Buddhist Sangha into two hostile camps . . . there is little evidence of any urge on their part to enshrine their different point of view in hard and fast sectarian categories."

9. It should be made explicit that I think Schopen has adequately shown that Hirakawa's (1963) notion of the Mahāyāna as emerging out of bodhisattva orders centered around stūpas is not sufficiently evidenced.

context in which there were already established forms of Buddhism, the development of a Mahāyāna identity was considered to require a foil, an other, in terms of which this particularly "Mahāyāna" Buddhist identity could be formulated.

It should come as no surprise if certain features of the construct "Hīnayāna" resemble certain features of non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism: again, the Mahāyāna identity developed in a milieu in which other forms of Buddhism were present. But, as nuanced interpretations of the particular discourses and practices of non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism indicate, the Mahāyāna construction of the "Hīnayāna" does not conform to non-Mahāyāna discourses and practices on many points.[10] And why should we expect it to? The Indian Buddhists who initially used the term "Hīnayāna" were not developing historical-critical interpretations of various forms of Buddhism, but rather were deploying a discourse to establish a new Buddhist identity, an identity different from—and, in their understanding, superior to—all other forms of Buddhism, a Mahāyāna identity.

Thus, I think it is a category mistake for contemporary western interpreters of Buddhism to consider "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" to refer to the same sort of thing. "Mahāyāna" refers to certain forms of Buddhist discourse and practice that began to emerge in India sometime between the first century BCE and the first century CE. "Hīnayāna" on the other hand refers to the Mahāyānist-constructed image of all non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism—and I emphasize, this is not a properly historical-critical construction, but rather a polemical one. Thus, despite its currency in some contemporary western interpretations of Buddhism, I suggest that the term "Hīnayāna"

10. Nalinaksha Dutt pointed this out some seventy years ago; see 1930: 134-135.

only be used to refer to Mahāyānist *constructions* of non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism, and not to non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism *simpliciter*.

Using the terms in this way will allow us to avoid certain unnecessary confusions and potentially difficult cases. For example, the inscription in Cave 22 referred to above may simply be understood as the inscription of a monk of the Aparaśaila sect who considered himself to be a follower of the Mahāyāna, a form of Buddhist discourse and practice directed towards the attainment of buddhahood.[11] Furthermore, it should come as no surprise that Fa hsien refers to monasteries in which both Hīnayāna (read "non-Mahāyāna") and Mahāyāna teachings were studied, that Hsüan tsang refers to the "Mahāyāna-Theravāda," or that I ching describes the distinction between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna monks as not very clear (Hirakawa 1990: 120-123). All of this is quite readily compatible with the view that the Mahāyāna refers to a particular form of discourse and practice which developed within particular sects, becoming dominant in some, playing a minor role in others, and in many remaining more or less anathematized.

If we understand the Mahāyāna as a form of Buddhist discourse and practice, what can then be said about the Mahāyāna? How may it be characterized? May it be generally characterized—in terms of its theory of salvation—as tending towards a form of gnosis soteriology? Although this is certainly a broad question—one that is not answerable in a few pages—I would like to make two remarks. (1) Considering the early textual evidence for the Mahāyāna, we know that the earliest extant Mahāyāna texts are

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11. Schopen (1985: 41-42, note 94) also presents a possible example offered by Bühler ("The new inscription of Toramana Shaha." *Epigraphia India I*: 1890: 238-241), which seems to contain both the "common Mahāyāna formula" and a reference to the Mahīśāsakas.

Lokakṣema's translations of some twelve texts into Chinese, prepared sometime between 178 and 198 CE (Hirakawa 1990: 247-252). This collection includes a translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, a text which shows an explicit concern for the attainment of omniscience (*sarva-jñatā*); the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* (Lokakṣema's translation is no longer extant), the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, and other texts concerned with the practices of bodhisattvas in their efforts to attain buddhahood; and the *Ajātaśatru-kaukṛtyavinodana*, which presents the doctrine that the original nature of mind is pure, and that it cannot be tainted by defilements. Thus there seems to be some evidence indicating that early Mahāyāna texts may express a form of gnosis soteriology.[12]

(2) Turning to inscriptions, I think we may also see that there is some epigraphical evidence for the claim that the Mahāyāna tends towards a form of gnosis soteriology. Schopen identifies one form of the standard Mahāyāna inscription as, "*yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatv ācāryopādhyāyamātāpitroḥ pūrvaṃgamaṃ kṛtvā sarva / sakala-satvānām/-rāśer anuttara-jnānāvāptaye*" (1979: 5).[13] It is evident from this standard formula that the goal towards which the inscription is ultimately directed is the attainment of unexcelled awareness (*anuttara-jñāna*), a goal which certainly conforms to that of buddhahood, understood as a form of omniscience. Thus we have some indication that

12. In examining the early Indian textual materials, *prima facie* it may be thought that texts centered around the figure of Amitābha or visions of his Pure Land may be the most difficult to consider as exhibiting a form of gnosis soteriology. However, it should be recalled that the ultimate goal identified in the larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha* (8.20)—a foundational Pure Land text—is not to reside eternally in the Pure Land, but rather, having attained rebirth in a Pure Land, to attain *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi* more easily. For a more interpretive approach, see O'Neill's article on "Parallels to Gnosticism in Pure Land Buddhism" (1995).

13. Slightly adapting those offered by Schopen, I translate as follows: "Having placed my teacher, preceptor, and parents first, may the merit here be for the obtainment of unexcelled awareness by all the multitude of sentient beings."

early Mahāyānist donors expressed a view of the Mahāyāna as directed towards the attainment of a cognitive state which was understood to be supreme. We may reasonably consider the implicit theory of salvation here to be a form of gnosis soteriology.

While these brief comments certainly cannot establish that Mahāyāna discourse about salvation may be generally characterized as gnostic, I do hope that the remarks suggest that it may be heuristically useful to consider whether various forms of the Mahāyāna tend towards a gnosis soteriology. But what may be said regarding non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism? May it be useful to consider those forms of Buddhism as tending towards a purification soteriology? I am reluctant to say much here as this question lies far beyond the purview of the present study. I will, however, make the following remarks for further consideration. (1) In his article "On the ignorance of the arhat," Jaini states that the *Abhidharmakośa* posits that arhats (i.e., arhats who are not also buddhas) "have not overcome the second kind of ignorance, *akliṣṭa-ajñāna*, the 'undefiled,' ordinary ignorance of the infinite varieties of objects that are distant in space and time" (in Buswell and Gimello 1992: 135). Thus in this context, arhats are understood to have eliminated all forms of *kleśa* (affliction, defilement), but not to have removed all forms of *ajñāna* (ignorance, non-awareness). Jaini also remarks that the "Theravādins shared the Vaibhāṣika belief that omniscience is that mark which distinguishes a buddha from arhats and pratyekabuddhas" (ibid., 137). (2) Making reference to the Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika tradition, Collett Cox states that the

> inclusive goal is the abandonment of specific defilements (*kleśaprahāṇa*) and the ultimate destruction of all fluxes (*āsravakṣaya*); extensive textual evidence both from early canonical texts and from Abhidharma materials argues that this—not

> concentration or knowledge alone—represents the final goal in many segments of the Buddhist tradition.[14]

Cox also provides extensive textual evidence from Pāli sources for the claim that "the destruction of the fluxes" is the "generalized goal of religious praxis" and the defining characteristic of arhatship (ibid., 67 and 94, note 14). And finally (3), in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* the category of *jñeyāvaraṇa* (cognitive obstruction) is entirely absent; the three forms of obstructions presented in that text may all be rather readily understood as forms of *kleśāvaraṇa* (see Hirakawa et al. 1973). All of these remarks may be understood to suggest the possibility that non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism do exhibit a tendency to develop what I have termed types of purification soteriology.

I wish to reiterate that my aim in these remarks is to suggest a possible line of thinking for further consideration. My hopes are that this interpretation of an emic categorization (i.e., the Mahāyāna vs. Hīnayāna as gnosis vs. purification), derived from reflections on the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, may be heuristically useful when applied etically (i.e., considering Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism as tending towards gnosis soteriology, and non-Mahāyāna forms as tending towards purification soteriology).

I began this study with characterizations of the Mahāyāna vis-à-vis non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. In closing, I would like to pose the following question for further consideration: in addition to the characterizations of the Mahāyāna offered earlier, may it also be possible to characterize the Mahāyāna as emphasizing a form of gnosis soteriology, rather than a form of purification soteriology?

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14. See Collett Cox, "Attainment through abandonment: the Sarvāstivādin path of removing defilements," in Buswell and Gimello 1992: 63-105 (the quotation appears on 66).

Appendix
Conceptual implications of various *yāna*-theories

Introduction

While thus far I have focused only on the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory—through interpreting that text's central distinction between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna—it should be recalled and emphasized that various competing *yāna*-theories may be found in Indian Buddhist texts, and in the course of Buddhist thought in general. Thus the MSA/Bh's *yāna*-theory represents one of a number of distinct Buddhist theories regarding vehicles of salvation. Whether one *yāna*-theory or another was espoused by any particular text or discourse is ultimately dependent upon a number of variables (e.g., institutional, historical, etc.) which largely fall beyond the scope of this study. The important point I wish to indicate, however, is that no *yāna*-theory is conceptually neutral: any *yāna*-theory that is endorsed will have conceptual implications relating to other terms, concepts, and categories that form the (more or less defined) conceptual web maintained by any particular text or discourse.

Here, then, I would like to set out some of the conceptual implications of a select few *yāna*-theories, abstractly considered. I say "a select few" because the possible number of *yāna*-theories is, strictly speaking, infinite (a *yāna*-theory may endorse one *yāna* or up to an infinite number of *yāna*s, and it may make an infinite number of distinctions among the various *yāna*s). Of course the number of *yāna*-theories actually evidenced by Indian Buddhist texts, or in the course of Buddhist thought in general, is far more limited. But the *yāna*-theories that I will reflect on here will be "abstractly

considered" in that I will not make reference to any particular Buddhist text or discourse. Nevertheless, I hope this account will be useful in indicating the way in which various *yāna*-theories have specific conceptual implications.

Since the following abstractly considered *yāna*-theories will not be tied to any specific, well-defined conceptual web (as evidenced by some text, corpus of texts, etc.), I will largely limit my identification of conceptual implications to ones which relate to basic Buddhist doctrines. And here I understand "basic" Buddhist doctrines to mean doctrines which would conceivably occupy a rather central role in any Buddhist conceptual web. The basic Buddhist doctrines considered in my account are the following:

<u>The four noble truths</u>
(1) *Duḥkha*: suffering — conditioned sentient existence is characterized by the experience of unsatisfactoriness.
(2) *Samudaya*: arising — suffering arises due to *tṛṣṇa*, thirst or craving; this thirst or craving is manifested through processes of *karma* (action) and *kleśa* (affliction) which maintain mental continua in conditioned existence.
(3) *Nirodha*: cessation — when *tṛṣṇa*, *karma*, and *kleśa* are terminated, the condition of *duḥkha* is also terminated.
(4) *Mārga*: path — there is an eightfold path for bringing about cessation.

<u>Other relevant doctrines</u>
(1) There are vehicles of Buddhism which are not specifically directed towards the goal of buddhahood.
(2) *Karuṇā*: compassion — the buddhas are characterized by great compassion for all sentient beings.

Of course a different set of basic doctrines could have been selected, and different conceptual implications could have been drawn out. But, again, my primary aim is to indicate the way in which a *yāna*-theory will have various conceptual implications, and for that purpose, the doctrines identified above will suffice.

Conceptual implications

Ayāna — no Buddhist vehicle: sentient beings are already fully awakened buddhas, although they do not realize it.

(1) Ontologically, a form of non-dualism may be easily upheld through a doctrine of illusionism—the world is an illusion; sentient beings are already buddhas, and this fact must simply be realized. (2) The doctrine of *duḥkha* must be negated to a great extent, or at least it must be given a much less significant position: if sentient beings are already fully awakened buddhas, then suffering is nothing more than an illusory experience; suffering is essentially unreal. (3) The importance of the path may be de-emphasized, since it is not fundamental to salvation. Sentient beings have always already attained salvation and, thus, have no need of a path. (4) Soteriologically, an almost pure form of gnosis soteriology is implied: the afflictions or defilements are unreal, since a buddha must already be fundamentally pure; all that remains is for sentient beings to become fully aware of their state of buddhahood.

Ekayāna — one Buddhist vehicle: there is only one vehicle of salvation, which leads to the attainment of buddhahood.

(1) Ontology and soteriology may be brought together in a relatively straightforward manner: there is only one reality and there is only one realization; salvation is the realization of reality. (2) *Duḥkha*, and the importance of *karma* and *kleśa* may be emphasized: as long as sentient beings have not entered the one path to salvation, or have not attained the ultimate goal of buddhahood, their existence is characterized by suffering and involved with action and affliction. (3) The ultimate invalidity of the non-Mahāyāna vehicles is implied. (4) The compassion of the buddhas may be emphasized,

in that no one is allowed to fall into the "lesser vehicle" of the "Hīnayāna." The buddhas' compassion may especially be emphasized if it is further posited that all sentient beings will ultimately attain buddhahood.

> ***Dviyāna*** — two Buddhist vehicles: the "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" lead to distinct ultimate soteriological goals.[1]

(1) The importance of *duḥkha* may be emphasized: as long as sentient beings have not attained one of the ultimate soteriological goals, their existence is characterized by suffering. (2) The role of *karma* and *kleśa* may also be emphasized: the way in which action and affliction are dealt with has a direct impact on the ultimate soteriological goal that is attained. (3) The compassion of the buddhas may be called into question: the buddhas allow some sentient beings to fall into the "lesser vehicle" of the "Hīnayāna." (4) Nevertheless, the ultimate validity of the non-Mahāyāna vehicles—the so-called "Hīnayāna"—may be affirmed: they also lead to an ultimate soteriological goal.

> ***Triyāna*** — three distinct Buddhist vehicles: those of the bodhisattva, pratyekabuddha, and śrāvaka; each vehicle, however, leads to the same ultimate soteriological goal: nirvāṇa (defined as an unconditioned state).[2]

(1) The centrality of *duḥkha* may be affirmed, and the role of *karma* and *kleśa* may be emphasized, which in turn lends great importance to the soteriological role of the path. (2) The ultimate and equal validity of all three Buddhist vehicles may be affirmed. (3) Any metaphysical aspect of buddhahood is strongly de-emphasized, perhaps even negated. Metaphysically, buddhahood is on a par with pratyekabuddhahood and

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1. This is the position upheld by the MSA/Bh.

2. If the three vehicles were to lead to three different goals, the implications would be substantially the same as those for the *dviyāna*.

arhatship. The special characteristic of buddhahood is not that it is somehow assimilated to reality; rather it is only that through the attainment of buddhahood, one becomes able to establish the dharma in some conditioned world-realm.

Abbreviations

BBh: Bodhisattvabhūmi

BEFEO: Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient

DT: Derge Tanjur (Sde dge bstan 'gyur)

I-IJ: Indo-Iranian Journal

IsMEO: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente

JIABS: Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies

JIBS: Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū)

JIP: Journal of Indian Philosophy

MSA: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra

MSABh: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya

MSA/Bh: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra and Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-bhāṣya

MSAT: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-ṭīkā (Asvabhāva's subcommentary)

MSAVBh: Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya (Sthiramati's subcommentary)

PE&W: Philosophy East and West

PT: Peking Tanjur (Peking bstan 'gyur)

WZKS: Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens ("WZKSO" before 1970)

WZKSO: Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens

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